

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL**

**HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 19 JULY 2017**

**THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5  
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

**Members Present:**

Mayor John Biggs	Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Khaless Uddin Ahmed	Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Rajib Ahmed	Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Shafi Ahmed	Councillor Aminur Khan
Councillor Suluk Ahmed	Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Ohid Ahmed	Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Mahbub Alam	Councillor Ayas Miah
Councillor Shah Alam	Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Amina Ali	Councillor Md. Maium Miah
Councillor Abdul Asad	Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah
Councillor Asma Begum	Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Rachel Blake	Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim
Councillor Dave Chesterton	Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury	Councillor John Pierce
Councillor Andrew Cregan	Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor David Edgar	Councillor Candida Ronald
Councillor Marc Francis	Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs	Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Peter Golds	Councillor Andrew Wood
Councillor Shafiqul Haque	

**The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Sabina Akhtar in the Chair**

On behalf of the Council, the Speaker of the Council expressed great shock and sadness about the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower Fire that occurred on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017. She thanked all those Officers and residents who had helped out and provided donations. She also expressed regret at the attack in Manchester at the Ariana Grande Concert and the attacks in other areas including on London Bridge, near Finsbury Park Mosque and the Westminster attack.

She called on everyone present to stand together, united in humanity and respect for one another. She stated that the Council's thoughts and prayers were with all those affected.

The Council rose to observe a minutes silence to remember those affected by the tragic events.

The Speaker brought Members up to date with her recent engagements. She reported that since the last meeting of the Council, she had supported a wide range of events including Citizenship Ceremonies, an Induction Day with new civic colleagues, an Army Engagement event in the Town Hall to learn about the opportunities for young people and Ramadan/Iftar celebrations. She wished all a belated Eid Mubarak.

She also had the privilege of welcoming Princess Royal, Princess Anne for the opening of the Graduate Centre at Queen Mary University of London, had attended the Royal Gun Salute to mark the state visit of HM King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia of Spain and had attended a 100 year birthday celebration.

Amongst her current projects, she highlighted that she was looking to extend the Speaker's Cadets to include the Army, Navy and Metropolitan Police.

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Clare Harrison
- Councillor Gulam Robbani
- Councillor Chris Chapman

Apologies for lateness was received on behalf of Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

Councillor Mohammed Maium Miah declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 6.1, 'Question relating to Project Stone' as he was a leaseholder of a One Housing property.

Councillors Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim and Ayas Miah declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5.1, 'Petition regarding Poplar HARCA' as leaseholders of a Poplar HARCA property.

Councillor Abdul Asad declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10.3 Report of the Audit Committee - Treasury Management Outturn Report 2016/17 as he had a pension with the Authority.

Councillor Helal Uddin declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5.1, 'Petition relating to Poplar HARCA' as his employer had a working relationship with Poplar HARCA and his wife had a leasehold interest in a Poplar HARCA property. He also declared a personal interest in Agenda 13.8 Motion on fire safety since Grenfell as he was a Council appointed Board Member of Tower Hamlets Homes.

Councillor Asma Begum declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5.4, 'Petition debate regarding Save Tower Hamlets Youth Sports' and as her

husband was a Board Member of the Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation.

Councillors with Declared Pecuniary Interests were required to leave the room for the duration of the relevant items.

### **3. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 17 May 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and the Speaker be authorised to sign them accordingly.

### **4. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE SPEAKER OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

The Speaker congratulated Rushanara Ali and Jim Fitzpatrick on their re-election as MPs for the Poplar & Limehouse and Bethnal Green & Bow constituencies at the recent General Election. She also congratulated Councillor Julia Dockerill on her election as MP for Hornchurch and Upminster.

The Chief Executive then gave a brief report regarding the running of the General Election in the Borough held on 9 June 2017. He advised that the task of arranging the election was not the easiest of activities given the eight week time period to prepare and also the challenge of registering an unprecedented number of voters. Nevertheless, thanks to all the hard work, the challenges were successfully overcome. He was also pleased to report that there was a high turnout in both constituencies. He expressed gratitude to the staff and police as well as the political parties for helping the election run so smoothly. He was also grateful for the positive feedback.

### **5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS**

#### **5.1 Petition regarding Poplar HARCA**

Petitioners addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Mayor John Biggs then responded to the matters raised in the petition. Whilst acknowledging that the Council had no jurisdiction over Poplar HARCA, the Mayor reported that he had worked closely with the organisation to reduce parking charges and save social housing. He would continue to lobby the organisation to influence their decisions. He also stated that leaseholders could lobby the organisation over such matters as services charges and major works and he was happy to meet with the petitioners to consider their concerns.

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the petition be referred to the Acting Corporate Director, Place for a written response within 28 days.

## 5.2 Petition relating to Save Our NHS

Dr Jackie Applebee Turner and others addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Rachael Saunders, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Health and Adults Services then responded to the matters raised in the petition. She advised that the Mayor had confirmed that he would not sign up to the North East London Sustainability and Transformation Plan until a wide range of issues had been addressed. She stated that she would continue to fight against the plans to centralise services and the cuts to health budgets. She also reported that she had met with NHS colleagues to express concerns about the proposals and the draft plans were available on line for local residents to view. She looked forward to working with the petitioners to address their concerns.

### RESOLVED:

1. That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Health, Adults and Community, for a written response within 28 days.

## 5.3 Petition relating to renewable energy

Petition not presented due to the absence of the petitioner.

### RESOLVED:

1. That the petition be referred to the Acting Corporate Director, Place for a written response within 28 days.

## 5.4 Petition Debate – Save Tower Hamlets Youth Sports

Chris Dunne addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and the Council then debated the matters raised by the petition. Following a debate, the Mayor responded to the petition. Whilst recognising that the Trust was operating at a deficit, he explained that the Council could not provide funding to the Trust without a clear a business plan. The Mayor was however willing to explore ways of supporting youth sport and young people for example through an Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussion.

### Procedural Motion

Councillor Oliur Rahman **moved** and Councillor Ohid Ahmed, **seconded**, a procedural motion “that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied such that item 13.12 Motion regarding John Biggs failing the Borough and austerity axing the Olympic Legacy be considered as the next item of business”.

The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **defeated**

**Procedural Motion**

Councillor Andrew Cregan **moved** and Councillor Rabina Khan, **seconded**, that under the rules for a Petition Debate, their motion on 'Save Tower Hamlets Youth Sport' be considered". The text of the motion was as follows:

**The Council Notes;**

- In Tower Hamlets, the Head Teacher of Langdon Park School, Chirs Dunne, led a campaign to sustain the essential work of the School Sport Partnerships.
- Aided by the Local Authority and supported by Tower Hamlets Schools who collectively replaced the lost funds; the Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation (THYSF) was established.
- Although THYSF's Board of Trustees raised funds and provided some guidance, staff employment remained with Langdon Park School.

**THYSF delivers the following;**

- Improves sports opportunities
- Increases sports & physical activity participation
- Utilise Sport for Personal and Community Development (Health, Social Cohesion, Educational Attainment, Youth Employment)

**The Council Further Notes;**

LBTH have now formally begun consultation with staff about the closure of this service. This will lead to:

- The combined school-community model which has led to huge improvements in the number of young people in Tower Hamlets participating in sport & physical activity
- The demise of opportunities for schools in Tower Hamlets to pool their Primary PE & Sport Premium funding for better strategic use (LBTH will return school funding to schools that is already committed for 2017-18)
- A decrease in the amount of physical activity and competitive sport experienced by over 30,000 young people in schools
- The demise of the **only** opportunities for young people in Tower Hamlets to participate in structured/competitive badminton, basketball, cricket, fencing, gymnastics, handball, hockey, judo, tennis or weightlifting.
- A loss of circa £250K additional funding secured for youth sport in Tower Hamlets
- The loss of 18 full time posts and over 50 part time positions, the vast majority of whom are borough residents (88% are under 25, 84% are BAME)

**The Council Resolves;**

- Suspend the current redundancy process in relation to all staff delivering THYSF services

- Instruct the business consultants currently working with Langdon Park School/THYSF staff to produce a full, public report to this Council meeting that outlines whether and how THYSF's current staff and services can exist as a business unit within the Council
- The Council's Sport & Physical Activity Department's staffing, function and budget falls within scope of the same review/report

At the end of the debate the tabled motion was put to the vote and was **defeated**

Mayor John Biggs **moved**, and Councillor Abdul Mukit **seconded**, a tabled motion on this subject [text of motion as set out in the resolution below].

Following debate, the tabled motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

**RESOLVED:**

**This council notes:**

- The good work Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation have done over previous years.
- THYSF is not and has never been directly funded by the Council, though it has received MSG funding and last year the council provided financial support to cover its deficit.
- The THYSF is and has always been primarily funded by the schools they provide services to and as schools have withdrawn from funding THYSF their finances have become problematic.
- The current situation has arisen as a result of THYSF income falling far below their costs. Mainly as a result of schools choosing to pull out from funding the organisation.
- Currently the organisation's staff are formally employed by Langdon Park School. Given the increasing concerns about THYSF's finances the school no longer wish to host them as they could end up liable for any deficit.
- Whilst THYSF are not a council service, last year the council agreed to underwrite the THYSF deficit and support them to produce a viable business plan that demonstrated that THYSF can cover all its expenditure from the income it receives.
- After a number of time extensions, the Trustees concluded that they could not submit a balanced business plan.
- The Council has not withdrawn any of its existing funding sources, nor where we proposing to.

- With the Council is facing £58m in cuts over the coming years we cannot continue absorbing THYSF's overspends each year as that would mean having to cut other projects.

**This council believes:**

- It is clear that Government cuts have made it far harder for schools to afford the THYSF service.
- The Council worked hard to support THYSF however we cannot make an open-ended commitment to underwrite hundreds of thousands of pounds in costs with no funding strategy in place. To do so would mean cutting other important council services.

**This council further notes:**

- The Mayor's commitment that should THYSF close the council will step-in for a year to support the running of the inter-borough, School Games and London Youth Games before commissioning another organisation to run them in future years.
- The plan to offer schools a core package of support should THYSF close, including specialist, cricket, hockey, cycling, football and other sports in conjunction with national sport governing bodies and organisations like Middlesex Cricket, England Hockey and professional football clubs.
- The plan to devise a strategy, alongside sport national governing bodies, for elite sport provision in Tower Hamlets and to support local sport clubs.

**This council resolves:**

- To condemn the Government cuts to school budgets which have led to schools withdrawing from the THYSF resulting in significant financial problems.
- To welcome the Council's role in supporting THYSF over the past year but to note with sadness that to take over full running of the service would require the council to cut other services in order to fund it.
- To welcome the alternative plan put forward by the Mayor to support youth sport, including the provision of the inter-borough, School Games and London Youth Games and support local clubs and elite sports.

**6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

The following questions followed by a supplementary question were put and were responded to by the Mayor or relevant Executive Member:-

**6.1 Question from Ahmed Hussain**

1. Argent wants to make the most money out of the regeneration 2. OHG wants to increase its stock as much as it can and wants to borrow money against OUR property 3. The council wants to shift some of its residents from the waiting list to the newly built homes (even though they will not get the preferred 35% out of this regeneration); they also want to increase their receipt on council tax All of the above are supported by the council under the current Mayors Executive Power

But what is the council doing to ensure:

1. The current leasehold and freeholders will get a like for like property; surely the council needs to be fair for all and not just look after itself, housing association and the developer?

**Response of Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development and Waste:**

I fundamentally disagree with the assertion within the question and as far as I know so does the Mayor that all of the above are supported by the Council under the current Mayor's executive power. Not only does he not have the power on this but also I don't believe it to be our vision for the Island. Of course we will and we have acted fairly on this issue. One of the things I was most concerned about when we first came into administration was the lack of attention provided by the previous administration on this very issue. As far as I could tell they had done nothing to hold One Housing Group to account on some of the plans that they had brought forward. It is interesting that so many of them have left, they don't even want to hear our conversation now about what is to be done about some of these plans that lack consultation and that lack, frankly, common decency in terms of how they have related to residents. I would like to be really clear that I dispute your assertion that parts one, two and three of your question are supported by the Council and I look forward to what you have to say next.

**Supplementary question from Ahmed Hussain:**

If there was a chance I would probably rewrite my question, but that is not the option here today.

The things that the Mayor and yourself are doing are brilliant and especially what Candida Ronald is doing with the four estates forum, which I attend, but there is more to do. The thing is, that it is our houses. It is our livelihood and you really need to take that in consideration and my supplementary question is, if the last administration could deliver a like-for-like for the Blackwall Reach



regeneration on Robin Hood Gardens, then surely you can do that too or at least put some pressure to this regeneration to include like-for-like?

**Councillor Rachel Blake's response to supplementary question:**

I am really pleased that you think that what we are doing so far is brilliant. As you know we have set up a working group to hold them to account. We demanded that they were straight with residents when they put forward a bid, that they had no support from residents for additional grants and we have really been really clear with them that they have no understanding of their own stock and they have no vision for the consultation on this scheme and we have made sure, we have held them to account, we have made sure that they bring forward a proper stock condition analysis that the four estates working group, that I think you are probably aware of, they had done none of that work before we started to really probe some of their ideas. We completely understand that these are your homes and that is why some of the ways in which this project has been talked about has appalled us so much. Specifically with your point around Blackwall Reach, that came with millions of pounds of a Labour government investing in new social housing. That's a Labour government that I campaigned for solidly in 2005, in 2010 and 2015 and again in 2017 and it is a Labour government that will bring forward significant amounts of additional money for social housing. That is how they were able to provide that very special deal that leaseholders got in the Blackwall Reach scheme. In terms of like-for-like we have to keep talking about like-for-like and what that actually means to leaseholders. We really are keen to get to the bottom of what like-for-like will mean for people, but we have to acknowledge that that deal, the Blackwall Reach deal, of that significant amount of money and that significant offer for leaseholders was only available because the Labour government chose to put in significant Investments into new affordable housing and the Tory government that we have at the moment is only prepared to put additional money into keeping itself in power rather than getting people into affordable homes that they so desperately need. Thank you for the question I hope we can keep talking.

**6.2 Question from Natasha Bolter:**

Could the Mayor please highlight his approach to bullying within his workforce and the community at large?

**Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

The answer is very simple. I am committed to tackling bullying both within the Council and across the Borough and unlike the previous administration I am an open and transparent Mayor and welcome constructive dialogue with everyone in our community whether they agree with me or not, rather than bullying those who disagree with me. More formally, if staff face concerns about bullying then there are proper personnel procedures and similar procedures apply if I think members of the public feel they are being oppressed in some way and I would want to uphold all of people's rights in our Borough to be protected from bullying.

**Supplementary question from Natasha Bolter:**

Mayor John Biggs, substantial allegations of islamophobia and bullying has come into the public domain by Councillor Khatun. This is putting politics into disrepute and it would be entirely improper and unprofessional to make such allegations without evidence. Can either you or Councillor Khatun affirm your claims with evidence and without proper evidence, one of you should resign?

**Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

I am not aware of any formal allegation. I am aware there was a public meeting that was on the Twittersphere and was attended by a number of people, including yourself, at which various assertions were made, but as I have said if personnel face accusations or feel they have been bullied then there are proper procedures within the Council to protect their wellbeing of employees' well-being within the Council. If other members of a political party have a similar position, then within the rules of that party there will be procedures for those concerns to be pursued within the proper party complaints procedure, which is not really a matter which we would discuss publicly in the first instance. Sadly I can't see where your question is going and I think what we would need to see would be a formal process at the end of which people would form a conclusion.

**6.3 Question from Kabir Hussain:**

Will the Mayor inform how many empty properties (excluding second homes) were in the Borough for each year between 2010-2016/17, and at the present?

**Response of Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development and Waste:**

The Council Tax records of empty dwellings in the Borough, excluding second homes between April 2010 and April 2017, are:

April 2010 – 5,142  
April 2011 – 4,757  
April 2012 – 5,383  
April 2013 – 4,596  
April 2014 – 4,880  
April 2015 – 4,233  
April 2016 – 5,105  
April 2017 – 6,211

**Supplementary question from Kabir Hussain:**

The Council record shows that there were 4,596 empty properties excluding second homes on 1st of April 2013, but it shot up to more than 6,098 empty properties in February 2017. Whilst huge waiting list, homelessness and housing crisis, do you think you are doing enough to tackle this issue of growing rate of empty properties.

**Councillor Rachel Blake's response to supplementary question:**

I think we could always do more on empty homes, I think there is always more to do. You will probably know that the way we tackle empty homes is, we have services that will pursue the people who are allowing their homes to stay empty. There is always a spike in empty homes when they are actually counted, because as soon as they come onto council tax records they are new homes and they might be waiting a short period before they come in. I should add that you heard my response earlier, I think that tackling empty homes is a really important part of solving London's housing crisis. I also think that building genuinely affordable social homes is the key way to solve London's affordability crisis. This administration is doing that. We set ourselves a target of 1,000 Council homes and we will also be looking into the empty homes that you are concerned about, but what we really want to see is some genuinely affordable homes coming forward in the Borough.

Question 6.4 was not put due to the absence of the questioner. A written response would be provided to the question. (Note: The written response is included in Appendix 'A' to these minutes.)

**7. MAYOR'S REPORT**

The Mayor made his report to the Council, referring to his written report circulated at the meeting, summarising key events, engagements and meetings since the last Council meeting.

When the Mayor had completed his report and at the invitation of the Speaker the Leaders of the Independent Group, the People's Alliance of Tower Hamlets and Councillor Andrew Wood on behalf of the Leader of the Conservative Group, responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

**8. STATE OF THE BOROUGH DEBATE**

The Mayor gave his address, focusing on past achievements and future challenges regarding: ASB and crime, housing, employment and growth, the cost of living, children and young people services, environment and waste, fire safety works, the leadership of the Council and community cohesion. He felt that much progress had been made but more still needed to be done.

Councillor Oliur Rahman (Leader of the Independent Group) responded to the Mayor's addresses. He expressed concern about the quality of children and youth services, cuts to services, the increase in crime unemployment and the cost of living.

Councillor Peter Golds (Leader of the Conservative Group) also responded to the Mayor report. He welcomed the government's plans to provide additional funding for affordable housing and stressed the need for additional infrastructure to accommodate new developments and for action to address the increase in ASB and fire safety issues. He also shared his views on the proposed changes to the Greenwich Foot tunnel.

Councillor Rabina Khan (Leader of the People's Alliance of Tower Hamlets) also gave her views on the State of the Borough. She expressed concern about child safeguarding issues, child poverty levels, the increase in hate crime, equality and diversity issues and the cuts to services in view of these issues.

The Mayor John Biggs then responded to the points. He noted the need for the Council to serve all of the people within the community. He reported that he would continue to focus on this objective.

At the end of the item, the Speaker adjourned the meeting at 9:15pm. The meeting was reconvened at 9.25pm

## **9. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

The following questions and in each case supplementary questions were put (except where indicated) and were responded to by the Mayor or relevant Executive Member

### **9.1 Question from Councillor Denise Jones:**

Can the mayor tell us what steps he has taken to ensure fire safety on Tower Hamlets Homes and other housing provider estates following the tragic Grenfell Tower disaster?

#### **Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:**

The Grenfell tower fire was a terrible tragedy and our thoughts and I know the prayers of everyone in the council go out to the victims, their friends and families.

The safety of Tower Hamlets residents is our top priority and in the wake of this tragedy we are taking the necessary precautions to protect residents.

All 900 blocks managed by Tower Hamlets Homes have had Fire Risk Assessments within the last year. The nine blocks identified as a "substantial" risk have been re-checked following the Grenfell Tower fire and works to reduce the risk level are underway, in close consultation with the London Fire Brigade.

The Mayor and senior officers met with local registered social housing providers to coordinate and provide mutual support in responding to resident concerns and Government guidance, particularly around cladding materials including emphasising the importance of robust FRAs, as well as working closely with the new Fire Brigade Commander.

Officers have also contacted private block owners and the Approved Inspectors responsible for ensuring construction materials and methods complied with building regulations.

The swift response to the recent fire at Dickinson House on Turin Street (Avebury Estate) demonstrated the readiness of the Council and Tower Hamlets Homes to act quickly and we've done fantastic work together.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Denise Jones:**

You have said that all the Tower Hamlets Homes properties have had new Fire Risk Assessments done in the last 9 months or so and I would like to know how these will be monitored in the future and how we are keeping those up. And also can you tell us how many Tower Hamlets Homes blocks had valid Fire Risk Assessments when you became the Mayor?

**Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:**

In the last nine months we ensured that all Tower Hamlets Homes blocks as well as RPs had approved FRAs. Prior to Mayor Biggs being elected we had no approved FRAs within the Council. In the last 9 months we have managed to get those done. How would we monitor FRAs, FRAs are carried out on a regular basis, an annual basis, so they will be rechecked, but I think that the Grenfell fire enquiry will probably recommend a newer kind of FRA regime, so you may know that FRAs only look at internal areas not the external cladding, so it could be a recommendation that we bring in more robust FRAs following the enquiry recommendations.

**9.2 Question from Councillor Ohid Ahmed:**

Can the Mayor confirm the precise figures and names of the high-rise buildings as well as tower blocks in the borough which are 'unsafe' or 'at risk' because of the 'substantial' or 'significant' fire risk, and what action has he taken to make sure these are safe?

**Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:**

The nine Council-owned blocks that were identified as a "substantial" risk in Fire Risk Assessments are Alzette, Brewster, Brodick, Malting, Modling, Offenbach, Puteaux, St Gilles and Velletri Houses.

Works are instructed and underway to reduce the risk to these blocks. None of these blocks are at risk due to the Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) type cladding which was installed at Grenfell Tower.

Brodick House has been undergoing significant works for a number of years and once complete later this year will be reassessed with our expectation the FRA rating will be significantly reduced.

The Mayor announced earlier this week that work on all other blocks which have a substantial rating are being procured and will start as soon as possible.

Obviously the only reason we know which blocks have fire safety issues is because unlike the previous administration we have undertaken a full suite of Fire Risk Assessments. Under the former Mayor and lead member for Housing many of these blocks developed significant problems which Mayor Biggs and I are now addressing after years of neglect.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Ohid Ahmed:**

Can I remind you that one of the independent expert on fire safety, professor Arnold Dix said that a fact is that Grenfell Tower burned so fast despite being deemed only a medium risk in the Fire Risk Assessments, showed that that a fire assessment did not work, so we need to take a lesson from this. Will the Mayor publish all FRAs as well as the planning assessments for the constituents in this Borough?

**Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:**

In terms of the fire I think there would be lessons learnt following the enquiry and we will follow those recommendations. Bracknell house 2009, recommendations came out; your administration failed to deliver on those recommendations, which is not good for the safety of this Borough. FRAs, the Mayor has already made a commitment that we will make all FRAs available to residents, we will probably start with the tower blocks first, I think that's the most important ones. We have committed, in terms of blocks, we cannot publish this now until DCLG give us the clearance.

**9.3 Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed:**

Can the Mayor update the council on his housing plans including the opening of Watts Grove and the new Private Renters Charter?

**Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:**

As you know the Mayor launched a new Housing Strategy with the aim of tackling the affordable housing crisis in Tower Hamlets and driving up standards. Since 2015 we have made massive strides in that work.

As you note, we recently launched a new Private Renters Charter to guarantee private renter's rights and improve quality of life for renters. Last year we also introduced a landlord licensing scheme in three wards and we are keen to extend that further should government allow it. To tackle the affordability crisis we are making major progress on the Mayor's pledge of 1,000 new homes. The new Watts Grove estate will begin to open next month providing 148 new council homes.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed:**

Thank you Councillor Islam. It seems like a lot is happening. Could you tell us how you are working to make housing more affordable?

**Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:**

In addition to the 1,000 council homes the Mayor is working to deliver we have delivered 1,070 new affordable homes last year and 1,073 the year before – far higher than under Lutfur Rahman and Councillor Rabina Khan who delivered just 630 in 2012/13 and only 595 in 2013/14. Though we accept affordable homes need to be genuinely affordable to local people. That is why for our new council homes, we have introduced far lower rents.

Under the previous Mayor and the then Cabinet Member for Housing, the average rents for new council developments were £239.08 a week for a two bed property. Under Mayor John Biggs' new policy, rents will be based on a combination of London Affordable Rent at £152.73 and the new Tower Hamlets Living Rent at £223.14 a week, both of which are significantly lower than rents under the previous administration.

The change means, compared to the previous Mayor's rent levels, a family living in a new three bed property will be up to £5,791 better off as a result of Mayor Biggs' changes.

**9.4 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood about fire safety inspections:**

Is the Mayor satisfied that all buildings in Tower Hamlets with cladding have now been checked or are in the process of being checked and that fire safety assessments are up to date?

**Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:**

Fire Risk Assessments to Council blocks managed by Tower Hamlets Homes are up to date as I have already explained.

The Council does not have authority to inspect Fire Risk Assessments carried out by other landlords, but all registered social housing providers locally report that they are up to date with Fire Risk Assessments and that any issues are being addressed.

All Council blocks over six storeys with cladding have been checked and all registered social housing provider blocks over six storeys with cladding have been checked or are in the process of being checked.

Officers have also contacted the Approved Inspectors responsible for ensuring construction materials and methods complied with building regulations on private blocks.

The Council does not have authority to require private owners to check cladding on privately owned blocks nor to provide their FRAs which has proved to be a significant problem responding to Grenfell and one which has been raised a number of times with Government. We are however doing all we can to contact and urge the managers of private tower blocks to follow suite.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Wood:**

Obviously the focus has been on Tower Hamlets Homes and social housing, but there was a brief mention there about private housing and hospitals and schools, but can the Cabinet member talk about other buildings as well especially hospitals and schools, whether there is any information about the checking of those in particular?

**Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:**

Yes. On top of the social housing that we are checking for cladding, my colleagues Councillor Amy Whitelock-Gibbs and Councillor Rachael Saunders have been talking to unions and schools as well and so far we haven't come across any of this cladding on other public buildings.

**9.5 Question from Councillor Candida Ronald:**

What is the Mayor doing to ensure that the failures revealed by the Clear Up investigation can never happen again, whoever is Mayor?

**Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

The clear up project was launched in September 2016 following discussions between the commissioners and myself and the senior leadership of the Council. By the time nominations closed on the 8th of December, 66 allegations had been received which have all been investigated. I committed at the onset of the project that the final report would be made public along with the investigators comments, which are here on the agenda this evening. No alterations have been made to the report. How do we ensure things never happen again? Well it's about changing the culture, the reporting framework and the relationships between Members and officers and relationships between Members and each other. Ensuring our codes and our probity arrangements are squeaky clean and everyone understands what should be happening, what their duties are to each other and to themselves and to the residents of Tower Hamlets. By working on that I think we can achieve a better arrangement. It is fundamentally part of the cultural change we need to make in this Borough, which I talk to members about from time to time.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Candida Ronald:**

Are you confident that any new systems will be robust enough to withstand any future assault?

**Mayor John Biggs response to supplementary question:**

I think any system can be tested to destruction by bad behaviour or by malevolent intent. What we need to do is have an empowered Council which will hold the Mayor to account. We have to have an empowered opposition that will hold the administration to account. We have to have statutory officers, we have a new monitoring officer who is a permanent employee, as her predecessor, sadly not here was, rather than an acting person who is at the



end of a piece of string from the Mayor or from the political leadership. We need to have proper understanding and relationships and probity in those relationships. By doing that I think we can be more assured, although we always need to watch out for the behaviour of people who will try and work the system.

#### **9.6 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan:**

Will the results of the cladding tests of both council and social high rise tower blocks in Tower Hamlets be made public?

#### **Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:**

The protocol with DCLG is that cladding test results conducted by the Building Research Establishment are reported to the Council and not made public until residents and local MPs in the affected blocks have been informed of the results. After that, the test results can and will be published.

#### **Supplementary question from Councillor Rabina Khan:**

My question is about the hospital right near me. I do wonder whether or not, what sort of cladding or whatever material has been used there, whether or not there could be a possibility of just finding this out? I ask in the interests of everyone in this community.

#### **Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:**

Yes, I totally understand. I think I have already answered that question. It needs be my colleague Councillor Saunders can talk to them herself and get some confirmation.

#### **9.7 Question from Councillor Helal Uddin:**

Can the lead member give an update on the performance of Work Path?

#### **Response of Councillor Joshua Peck, Cabinet Member for Work & Economic Development:**

It is early days for work path. It is effectively the first quarter, so I don't want to make any early judgements, but certainly things look very positive. We have seen, even in the first quarter, a 24% increase in the number of residents who are engaging, up from 340 to 420. A 54% increase in the number of residents starting work and a 42% increase in the number of employers that we have got on board.

#### **Supplementary question from Councillor Uddin:**

You may be aware there are long term issues of people in this borough who are long-term unemployed and also I am sure you are particularly aware of the approach we are having from Jobcentre Plus. There is a soft approach to addressing the long-term unemployment issue and economic increase in the

borough. Do you have any plans for how you will address these particular issues?

**Councillor Joshua Peck's response to supplementary question:**

We have got lots of plans. You will remember that in the Mayor's last budget we put an extra £5 million into schemes to enable our residents to break down some of the barriers that keep them out of work. We have made a major extension of the women into health and social care programme. This work with many women across the Borough, who are probably the biggest group who face long-term unemployment and barriers to work. We are massively increasing our ESOL provision, both by recruiting more tutors, also putting in place vocational ESOL training but also by setting up an ESOL hub that enables us to direct residents to spare places on other suppliers' courses. We've got an over 50's adviser already in place and working and with Councillor Whitelock-Gibbs. We are leading a really big project to look at how we can break down the barriers to affordable child care that keeps many people out of work. So there's a massive amount going on, some really positive early stuff.

**9.8 Question from Councillor Oliur Rahman:**

Can the Mayor confirm what salary is he claiming at present from the Council - is it the full increase to his pay packet that he granted himself in his budget - and since when has he claimed this full increase? Will he confirm if he receives any other allowances, salaries, money or perks from the Council or elsewhere?

(In addition, notwithstanding what may or may not be currently on the council website buried in reports, for the sake of transparency and for the benefit of residents who may not have time to explore website links or read reports full of jargons, will the Mayor clearly list all his current, past and up to date hospitality/gifts, salaries, allowances and any financial interests since the day he became the Mayor, and list the full details in the minutes for a simple public record reference?)

**Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

As you well know, when I became Mayor I proactively reduced my allowance to £30,000 for my first year which was less than half of the allowance for the Mayor in Tower Hamlets. All allowances are within or below the levels recommended by the 2014 report of the independent panel. I happen to be the lowest paid Mayor in London as well. When allowances were increased in 2016 I only took half of the rise for that year. This year there has been no increase in my allowance, but I have chosen to take the full allowance. Unlike some of my predecessors I believe the Mayor is a full time job. I regularly work 6 days a week. I start here just after 7 a.m. and get home around 10 p.m. in the evening, I must be crazy I think, but I do it out of a sense of duty and service. I do not receive any additional allowances, salaries or perks from the Council. I don't claim for a telephone. I don't claim for travel other than three exceptions, when I have been to conferences outside of London and the train

fare has been paid for by the Council and on two occasions overnight stays, which I was very reluctant to take up, because I prefer being in Tower Hamlets.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Rahman:**

What the Mayor did not say was when he first started here he was getting two salaries. He was getting paid from the GLA and he was getting money from the Council, so clearly you had more money than what you actually told us Mr Mayor. Do you think you getting a 14.24% pay rise you are putting residents first or yourself first and would you apologise for the hypocrisy, when your group was in opposition for the motion that was put down to cut the Mayor's salary?

**Mayor John Biggs' response to supplementary question:**

I have stated very clearly, I think it was a mistake of the opposition group when the previous Mayor was Mayor, to cut his salary in the way they did. I think it is a serious job and we should expect whoever takes that job on to receive a pay which is similar to or greater than that of a Member of Parliament. I am very clear about that. The previous Mayor's expenses, you talked about junkets and so on, in a 6 month period he took 85 cab journeys costing taxpayers £2,789. If I pick on one member, say, Oliur Rahman, he took £1,841 for 67 cab rides, including 39 between Stratford Jobcentre, where he works and the Town Hall. Maybe with his new concern for taxpayers' money, he can tell us if he intends to pay any of those journeys back. It is very important that we get value for money and I think that when there is a fantastic transport system people should think very hard before they use a taxi service.

**9.9 Question from Councillor John Pierce:**

How many meetings of Tower Hamlets Homes board were inquorate, preventing key strategic decisions being made, due to non-attendance of councillors, appointed by Mayor Rahman from 2012 – 2015?

**Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:**

THH is an incredibly important organisation for 20,000 of our residents and any councillor appointed to their Board has a duty to engage properly for the benefit of those residents.

I am disappointed, but not surprised, to report that five Board meetings were cancelled under the previous administration between 2012 and February 2015 due to the non-attendance of at least two Councillors. Another had to be abandoned half way through as the councillors walked out. That's almost 40% of meetings disrupted or cancelled.

The councillors who sat on the Board at this time were:

- Alibor Choudhury
- Kabir Ahmed (until May 2014)

- Lutfa Begum (Until May 2014)
- Gulam Robbani
- Maium Miah (From Oct 2015)
- Abdul Asad (From Oct 2015)

All from Tower Hamlets First. Their attendance was appalling. The worst was Lutfa Begum who attended just 20% of meetings then Councillor Gulam Robbani who attended just 38%.

By that standard I suppose we should congratulate Councillors Miaum Miah and Abdul Asad who managed to turn up to a third of their meetings, but Just not good enough.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Pierce:**

Do you agree that if Tower Hamlets Homes had been in a housing association it would have been downgraded by the regulator and they would be considering taking over that organisation, because of actions of the members opposite. The two thousand homes that are managed locally would have been taken away from the control of the Council. How concerned are you about the failings of the members opposite, in regards to the management of our housing provider and aren't we lucky that there were no serious incidents in our neighbourhoods whilst they were in control of Tower Hamlets Homes?

**Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:**

I totally agree Councillor Pierce and since Mayor Biggs' election, not a single meeting of Tower Hamlets Homes Board has been inquorate, with all our Councillors on board. Yes, it probably would be downgraded. We know about Poplar HARCA, we spoke about this earlier on, that because non-attendance of Council Members that RP decided to reject Councillors on that board. I am sure that other RPs could do the same as well and it is not right that when we put members on RP boards, or Tower Hamlets Homes Board that we have a responsibility for them to deliver for the residents of this Borough and not just turn up to the meetings they like and walk out of those meetings they dislike.

**9.10 Question from Councillor Peter Golds:**

Will the Mayor inform the council as to whether the four homeless families have moved into the Shoreditch area property stated in the decision of the Asset Management Board seven months ago on the 9th December 2016?

**Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

In April of this year I signed a Mayoral decision allowing a meanwhile use for a community organisation whose mosque was planned to undergo works that would require decanting. The organisation, the City Bangladeshi Cultural and Community Centre has already received planning permission. It is my understanding that adaptation for the site into residential occupation would take 6 months to be on site. This is partly because it had been squatted and vandalised by the squatters, so needed further work to get it into good order.

The arrangement with the City Bangladeshi Cultural and Community Centre was with very clear conditions which required the mosque to vacate once their existing premises are refurbished. They haven't yet taken up occupation because they haven't satisfied those conditions. It remains to be seen whether they will be able to. As part of the decision we evaluated the financial cost and the timelines and I think this represents reasonable value for the people of Tower Hamlets and a good service for the community if it goes ahead.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Golds:**

Will, at some point, 10 Turin Street be returned for housing with people and if so when is this likely to happen?

**Mayor John Biggs' response to supplementary question:**

My intention would be that it be refurbished and made available for full housing units sometime during next year, which was indicated on the timeline in the mayoral decision, which I believe has been published and I am happy to talk to the member outside this meeting about that.

**9.11 Question from Councillor Marc Francis:**

When will there be a safer crossing over the A12 at Wick Lane?

**Response of Councillor Amina Ali, Cabinet Member for Environment:**

We have been working closely with TfL Signals on the design of improvements to accommodate pedestrian phases into the signals at this junction.

I am pleased to announce agreement and final approval on the design and modelling has almost been finalised and there is a provisional date for completion of the works by December 2017.

The proposals include:

- Green man phases across all on and off slip roads from the A12;
- Narrowing of the entry slips to one carriageway width to provide a shorter distance for pedestrians to cross;
- Footway redesign at Wick Lane to reduce the width of the mouth of the junction;
- Revised traffic management orders to stop the straight across movement from off slip to on slip, thus restricting movements to one lane right turn, one lane left turn at each exit slip;
- Further consideration is also being given to extending the box junctions to keep the area clear and prevent vehicles blocking the junction.

Finally, I just want to say that safety is paramount to us; we will continue to look at ways to improve safety in the borough.

**Supplementary Question from Councillor Marc Francis:**

Can I welcome the lead member and congratulate her on her appointment and especially her speedy success after 12 long years of lobbying and campaigning for a pedestrian crossing, all we needed to do at the outset was for the lead member to come from Bow West ward. Can the lead member ensure us the London Borough of Tower Hamlets will press for early implementation of the new pedestrian crossing in 2018?

**Councillor Amina Ali's response to supplementary question:**

As I stated there is a provisional date for completion of works of December 2017. Therefore in line with this Council's commitment to safety, I am hopeful we will be able to push for this date.

**9.12 Question from Councillor Shah Alam:**

Following the stabbing of Syed Jamanoor Islam, the Mayor committed to the requests of the family in Altab Ali park, can he please provide an update to the council as to what he has completed to date?

**Response of Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Community Safety:**

The terrible murder of Syed Jamanoor Islam was a tragedy and our thoughts are with his family at this difficult time.

Tackling knife crime to prevent these tragedies is a top priority for the council.

The Mayor agreed he would support London citizens in any campaign they launched on knife crime and he stands by that pledge. However we have not been idle on this issue. Following the rise in knife crime earlier this year a partnership task and finish group was set up.

This task force has resulted in:

- A number of Community/police and council weapon sweeps in target areas.
- A rolling programme of knife test purchase activity is going on.
- We are educating young people with intervention programmes in a community setting.

We still have a long way to go and more work is definitely needed.

No supplementary question was asked.

**9.13 Question from Councillor Danny Hassell:**

Will Tower Hamlets have a Creative Enterprise Zone when announced by the GLA later this year?

**Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

I certainly hope so and, on the creative Enterprise zones, we are working with the Mayor of London and the GLA in establishing Fish Island and The Lower Lea Valley as a Zone. They are important areas in the cultural fabric of London and it is important to get things like the affordability of creative work spaces and ensure that in planning decisions we maintain creative work spaces and we support the creative industries, they are major employers in our Borough and we have for too long neglected the SME sector. I am working with Councillor Rachel Blake and with Councillor Joshua Peck on the employment and the regeneration aspects of this. It is important for our Borough that we maintain our creative sector and do not allow it to be squeezed out. One of the great anxieties in that area of Fish Island is that property development will squeeze people out of the area. And working in partnership with the London Legacy Development Corporation, I am hoping we can achieve some good objectives to that end.

No supplementary question was asked.

Questions 9.14 - 29 were not put due to lack of time. Written responses would be provided to the questions. (Note: The written responses are included in Appendix 'A' to these minutes.)

**10. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES****10.1 Report of the Executive - Clear Up Board Final Report**

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance, presenting the findings of the Clear Up Board.

Following debate, the recommendation was put to the vote and was **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report of the Clear Up Board be noted.

**Extension of time limit for the meeting**

Councillor Danny Hassell **moved**, and Councillor Sirajul Islam **seconded**, a procedural motion that "under Procedure Rule 15.11.7 the meeting be extended for up to an additional 20 minutes to enable the remaining reports on the agenda to be considered".

The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

**10.2 Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2016/17**

Councillor John Pierce, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2016-17, presented the Committee's Annual Report for that year.

Following debate, the recommendation was put to the vote and was **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the contents of the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2016-17 be noted.

**10.3 Report of the Audit Committee - Treasury Management Outturn Report 2016/17**

The Council considered the report of the Audit Committee setting out the Treasury Management Outturn for 2016/17.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council note:

1. The Treasury Management activities and performance against targets for the twelve months to 31 March 2017.
2. The Pension Fund investments balance (set out in section 9 of Annex A to the report).
3. The Council's investments as at 31 March 2017 (as in Appendix 2 of Annex A to the report).
4. The Prudential indicators outturn for 2016/17 (set out in Appendix 1 of Annex A to the report).

**11. TO RECEIVE REPORTS AND QUESTIONS ON JOINT ARRANGEMENTS/EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS (IF ANY)**

There was no business to transact under this agenda item.



## 12. OTHER BUSINESS

### 12.1 Late Night Levy

The Council considered the report of the Chief Executive in respect of the Late Night Levy consultation process.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the use of the delegated powers by the Chief Executive under part 2 of the constitution, Article 12.06( c )(ii) due to an emergency or extreme urgency whether or not reserved to the Council to enable the commencement date of the late night levy to be rescinded. The reason being that there was not a full Council meeting between the service of the Judicial Review application from ALMR and the 1<sup>st</sup> June.
2. To note the proposed new commencement date of the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and the further re-consultation the outcome of which will be brought back to full Council for further consideration and decision as to whether or not to adopt the levy.

### 12.2 Proposed Revision to the Constitution - Part 3.3 (Overview and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference)

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance proposing a number of revisions to Part 3.3 (Overview and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference) of the Council's Constitution

The recommendations were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. That it be resolved that the Muslim Faith representative on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is able to vote on Education matters; and
2. That the Terms of Reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Part 3.3 of the Constitution be amended by the Monitoring Officer to reflect that the Muslim Faith representative can vote on Education matters

**12.3 Proposed Revision to the Constitution - Parts 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7**

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance proposing a number of revisions to Parts of the Council's Constitution.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council note:

- The spreadsheet in Appendix 1 of the report setting out the revisions and the reasons;

That the Council approve:

- The revised Part 4.2 of the Constitution (Access to Information Procedure Rules) in Appendix 2 with the revisions shown as tracked changes;
- The revised Part 4.3 of the Constitution (Budget and Policy Framework Procedure) in Appendix 3 with the revisions shown as tracked changes;
- The revised Part 4.5 of the Constitution (Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules) in Appendix 4 with the revisions shown as tracked changes;
- The revised Part 4.6 of the Constitution (Financial Regulations and Procedure Rules) in Appendix 5 with the revisions shown as tracked changes; and
- The revised Part 4.7 of the Constitution (Contracts and Procurement Procedure Rules) in Appendix 6 with the revisions shown as tracked changes.

**12.4 Proposed Revision to the Constitution - Part 5.2 (Planning Code of Conduct)**

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance proposing a number of revisions to Part 5.2 (Planning Code of Conduct) of the Council's Constitution.

The recommendation was put to the vote and was **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the revised Planning Code of Conduct in Appendix 1 of the report be approved.

**13 TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

None of the submitted Motions were debated due to lack of time

The meeting ended at 10.30 p.m.

Speaker of the Council

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## **APPENDIX A – WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS THAT WERE NOT PUT AT THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING (19 JULY 2017)**

### **6.4 Question from Dipu Jagirdar**

What is the Mayor doing to stop our schools turning in to Academies?

#### **Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs:**

We are proud of our schools in Tower Hamlets. Over the past twenty years we've made amazing progress as a community improving standards and making our schools some of the highest achieving in the country.

We've done this through a Labour government investing properly in schools and by the council, teachers, governors and parents working together as one community of schools focused on delivering the best for local children.

In Tower Hamlets we have resisted the introduction of academies and free schools but the Conservative Government has tied our hands. Once they make a decision to approve a school becoming an academy there is nothing the council can do to stop it.

We believe that schools should consult thoroughly with parents and the local community about their plans and we would be deeply disappointed if that did not happen. But in the end it is school governors who make the decision, even when there may be different views. There is clearly something very wrong with Government policy which allows this.

To date only 3 secondary schools (20% of 15 schools in total) and 5 primary schools (7.5% of 65 schools) have converted to become academies. This is much lower than some boroughs as we have resisted academisation more successfully than most boroughs through our culture of supporting a close community of schools in Tower Hamlets.

For schools who do decide to academise, Mayor John Biggs has brought in a new policy, which means schools which wish to convert are asked to make a £6,000 contribution to the council's costs for administration related to the change including guidance and the legal costs associated with asset transfers for example. We did this as we believe a school's decision to academise should not end up costing council taxpayers. We are also giving guidance on what we think is good consultation, although in the end the Government has set rules that allow schools to decide the consultation rules for themselves.

#### **9.14 Question from Councillor Mahbub Alam**

Given the alarming increase in Islamophobic hate crimes in recent time, particularly the shocking rise in acid attacks against Muslims, including those in Tower Hamlets, one of which took place on 29 June 2017 in Watney Market (unreported and possibly not recorded), and another attack on Burdett Road, E3 at 02:13hrs on 4 July 2017 (recorded and reported) as well as other such attacks - will the Mayor provide the figures for acid attacks, including any form of dangerous chemical, in Tower Hamlets for each year since 2011?

#### **Response from Councillor Asma Begum:**

Recent acid attacks across the capital, including in Tower Hamlets, have understandably shocked and angered local residents in the East End and the council condemns the perpetrators in the strongest possible terms.

Since the incidents reported in Tower Hamlets we have been working with the police and using council CCTV footage to support their investigations to ensure those responsible are caught and face the full force of the law.

We are committed to tackling acid attacks and the Mayor has already written to the Home Secretary to ask that acid is treated on a par with other offensive weapons and for the necessary support from the Government.

Data for acid attacks in Tower Hamlets is below. Please be advised that data available to the Council Community Safety Team is via official published websites (Metropolitan Police and Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime). The following data has been extracted from a Freedom of Information Request published on the internet.

**2011 – 7**

**2012 – 2**

**2013 – 4**

**2014 – 6**

**2015 – 24**

**2016 – 42**

**2017 (to June) – 11**

The rise in recent years has been mirrored across London and is not isolated to Tower Hamlets.

The above incidents of Acid Attacks are defined as victims of "Causing explosions, sending explosive substance or throwing corrosive fluids with intent to grievous bodily harm."

### **9.15 Question from Councillor Shiria Khatun**

What is being done to ensure fire safety inspections are being carried out for residential blocks in the borough?

#### **Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam**

Following the tragic events of the Grenfell Fire the Council took immediate and proactive measures to protect our residents, including immediately taking steps to evaluate the safety of tower blocks in Tower Hamlets.

All 900 blocks managed by Tower Hamlets Homes, including 69 blocks over 6 storeys high, have had Fire Risk Assessments within the last year. The nine blocks identified as a “substantial” risk have been re-checked following the Grenfell Tower fire. Fire Risk Assessments to Council blocks managed by Tower Hamlets Homes are up to date. The Council does not have authority to inspect Fire Risk Assessments carried out by other landlords but all registered social housing providers locally report that they are up to date with Fire Risk Assessments.

All Council blocks over six storeys with cladding have been checked. All registered social housing provider blocks over six storeys with cladding have been checked or are in the process of being checked. Officers have also contacted the Approved Inspectors responsible for ensuring construction materials and methods complied with building regulations on private blocks. Whilst the Council does not have authority to require private owners to check cladding on privately owned blocks we urge them to do this proactively.

We will continue to monitor the fire safety of tower blocks in Tower Hamlets and to take all necessary steps to protect residents.

### **9.16 Question from Councillor Julia Dockerill**

Following the meeting I organised on the 27<sup>th</sup> April at St Georges Town Hall to discuss Anti-Social Behaviour problems in St Katharine’s & Wapping ward will the Mayor provide an update on the specific issues raised in particular the actions requested by the Borough Commander after the meeting.

#### **Response from Councillor Asma Begum**

The meeting was we understood jointly arranged and attended by Cllr Denise Jones, Cllr Shiria Khatun, a number of council officers, and at the end by the Mayor who attended from another meeting.

Tackling anti-social behaviour is one of the council’s top priorities. Following feedback from residents, we carried out a ward walkabout in this area on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017 to address the key areas of concerns that were highlighted. Please find listed below the actions agreed from the walkabout.

**Benson Quay/ Shadwell Basin**

- THEOs are now tasked to conduct evening patrols in the area following reports from residents
- SNT have agreed to communicate dates of weapon sweeps and speed operations to residents in the area
- SNT have agreed to provide patrols/shift pattern information to residents at their next ward panel meeting

**St Georges Park & Wapping Woods**

- SNT and THEOs are aware of drug use and drug dealing occurring here, and will conduct patrols at different times of the day to these areas
- The THEOs have already started patrolling St Georges Park as a result of recent ASB/drug dealing reports

**Vaughan Way/Kennett Street and Wapping Lane**

- SNT have agreed to communicate dates of speed operations to residents in the area
- SNT have agreed to start using Section 59 to seize vehicles found to be speeding and causing ASB
- LBTH Transport & Highways Team will be installing 2 covert CCTV cameras in the next few weeks to monitor speeding vehicles
- LBTH Transport & Highways Team will be installing special speed bumps and bollards to the side of each bump, that force push bikes and vehicles to slow down (in the next few months)
- LBTH Transport & Highways Team will be consulting with residents in regards to improving Wapping Lane and looking at how to reduce noise from vehicles driving on the cobbled streets, staggering parking and using the traffic monitoring vehicle to build evidence

**Hermitage Basin and Hermitage Gardens**

- LBTH CCTV will be installing a redeployable camera in the park to identify NO2 users and vehicles parking up to cause ASB.

We will continue to monitor and address concerns, particularly using our new ASB policy and increasing the number of council-funded police officers.

**9.17 Question from Councillor Dave Chesterton**

Will the Mayor please take whatever action he deems necessary to prevent the demolition of the No.1 gas holder at Leven Road, Poplar? This gas holder, made at Ironworks on the Isle of Dogs and erected in 1878 is of significant local historical interest and should be preserved as part of the redevelopment of this part of Poplar.

**Response from Councillor Rachel Blake**

The Council recognises this significant local historical asset and there is a case that it should be preserved as part of redevelopment.

In planning policy, this is specifically reflected in the adopted and emerging Local Plan, where in the site allocation, it states that development should aim to “...**retain and integrate the gas holders** as part of the provision of green open space...”



The council plans to strengthen the design principle within the site allocation and seek to further acknowledge the gasholders significant local historical merit.

It should be noted that the gasholder is not listed, or located within a conservation area or included on the Council's Local List.

In light of a petition submitted as part of the Local Plan process, the No. 1 Gasholder at Leven Road Poplar is considered as having been nominated for addition to the Council's Local List.

Once the nomination process and selection criteria for additions to the Local List have been adopted by the council, a decision will be taken as to whether or not it would be appropriate to add Gasholder No.1 at Poplar to the Local List.

### **9.18 Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed**

The legal definition of an offensive weapon includes anything intended to be used to harm another person, like a sharpened comb. Acid must also now be seen as an offensive weapon. Will the Mayor write a joint letter with all Group Leaders to the Secretary of State to review the legislation of acid so that to carry acid or corrosive substance will be an offensive weapon?

### **Response from Councillor Asma Begum**

The recent acid attacks in Tower Hamlets were appalling crimes and the Mayor and I are determined to support the police in tackling these shocking crimes.

I can confirm that the Mayor and I have already written to the Government and have copied this below. I will, of course, keep the council and the public informed of any response and developments. Should Group Leaders wish to write in similar terms to support this proposal I am sure the Mayor would welcome that.

*Dear Ms Rudd,*

*Recent acid attacks across the capital, including in Tower Hamlets, have shocked and angered local residents in the East End.*

*Using acid to attack and disfigure people is a heartless and unforgivable crime. It's totally wrong that these vicious and often life-changing assaults are not punished more severely.*

*The Government should be sending a clear message that anyone who uses acid to harm others is going to face a long prison sentence. That is exactly what I am calling for you as Home Secretary to do.*

*In light of the recent rise of these kinds of attacks there is simply no excuse for the Government dragging their feet on introducing harsher punishments. Hopefully this week's debate in Parliament will push the Government to take faster action.*

*As you will know in 2016, there were 455 offences recorded where a corrosive/acid substance was used across London: this year to date there have already been more than 150. Of those, 11 have been in Tower Hamlets.*

*More needs to be done to tackle this horrific crime which in some recent cases worryingly seems to have been adopted by gangs. Given the concern about this new tactic, will the Government make clear they will treat acid attacks just as seriously as attacks with knives or other offensive weapons, and legislate appropriately? This should in my view include exploring making it an offence to carry, without good reason, dangerous substances like sulphuric acid, particularly if it is carried in a manner likely to be used for violence, for example a water pistol. There also need to be far stricter checks on purchasing these kinds of corrosive liquid.*

*It is also clear that in addition to new powers in this area, the Met Police also needs to be given the funding to tackle these attacks. The Met has already been forced to make cuts of over £600 million since 2010, with the loss of thousands of police officers, and I urge the Government to think again before cutting the Met even further.*

*It is clear that the shocking acid attacks in London are of great concern to residents in the East End. I hope you will give the police the support, resources and authority to tackle these appalling crimes and make clear to perpetrators they will be caught and punished just as seriously as those who use knives or other weapons to do harm.*

*I look forward to your response.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Mayor John Biggs  
Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets*

#### **9.19 Question from Councillor Ayas Miah**

Does the Mayor support the Mayor of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone?

#### **Response from Councillor Amina Ali**

The Mayor of London's Ultra Low Emissions Zone is an important part of his work to tackle poor air quality in the capital.

We support any ambition to reduce air pollution and look forward to working with the Mayor of London on his ULEZ proposal as further details emerge.

Whilst regional and national work to tackle air pollution is vital, in Tower Hamlets we are also doing our bit. We are investing in electric vehicles and charging points, have set up a cross-borough Low Emissions Neighbourhood and are currently consulting on a new air quality action plan to improve our local environment.

By contrast I would note that the Government's recently published Air Quality plan seems to be nothing but hot air after they failed to provide any new action which would help to clean up the capital's pollution problem.

#### **9.20 Question from Councillor Md. Maium Miah**

On Monday 26 June 2017, a mother was shockingly hit by a lorry due to dangerous driving in Westferry Road. I attended the scene and residents told me that dangerous driving and lack of proper road safety management/enforcement are among the most consistent and serious concerns for local residents, and across the Isle of Dogs. These issues, along with persistent traffic chaos, building and maintenance work activities mostly sanctioned by the council is turning the Canary Wharf Ward and the Isle of Dogs into an unsafe and chaotic place for both pedestrians and drivers. Will the Mayor tell us what action has been taken to address these issues for Canary Wharf and Isle of Dogs residents?

#### **Response from Councillor Amina Al**

We take road safety extremely seriously and are determined to do all we can to reduce collisions.

In general, numbers of fatal and serious injuries arising from collisions have shown a continuing reduction over the past 10 years, but there is a worrying continuing increase in numbers of slight injury accidents reported to the Police.

Council officers regularly review these collision patterns and trends and prioritise schemes to make the biggest impact in reducing collision numbers.

In relation to the particular incident Cllr Miah refers to, officers have consulted the Police for information and it would not be appropriate to go into detail at this stage when Police investigations are continuing, however the initial report does seem to indicate that the road layout design was not considered to be a contributory factor.

It is important to note that the Council does not have any power of enforcement over speeding drivers or other reckless driving behaviour. The enforcement of poor driver behaviour is a Police matter but we will continue to work closely with them including on enforcing the borough-wide 20mph zone we have introduced on non-TfL roads.

### **9.21 Question from Councillor Chris Chapman**

Given issues raised in the Channel 4 Dispatches programme on the 3rd July about cruise ship related air, noise and light pollution, what steps is the Mayor and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets undertaking regarding cruise ships on the River Thames, docks and in the future docking at Enderby Wharf which is contiguous to the Isle of Dogs?

### **Response from Councillor Rachel Blake**

This is an important and ongoing issue you raise with no simple answer. The issue of air, noise and light pollution coming from cruise ships is complicated and requires a range of engagement with different agencies.

Local Authorities do not have statutory powers to enforce air quality limits for cruise ships.

The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) is the main international convention covering prevention of pollution of the marine environment.

DEFRA is responsible for the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland which covers all air pollution sources which breach air quality objectives.

The Port of London Authority is currently developing an Air Quality Strategy <https://www.pla.co.uk/environment/Air-Quality-and-Green-Tariff/Air-Quality> .

And LBTH's Air Quality Action Plan has an action requiring consideration of potential pollution emissions from proposed river development under the planning regime.

With respect to Enderby Wharf specifically, as required under planning legislation, Greenwich Council consulted LBTH on the revised planning application. Officers commented on the EIA and the planning application, and raised concerns seeking to improve air quality.

We will continue to campaign for on-shore-side power provision and make the case to the Mayor of London and Greenwich Council so that the scheme does not have the negative air quality impacts forecast. The Mayor has also requested a meeting with the Leader of Greenwich Council to discuss this important issue.

### **9.22 Question from Councillor Aminur Khan**

The Tower Hamlets Sports Foundation delivers a fantastic sports programme for children and young people in Tower Hamlets. Will the Mayor and his Cabinet ensure that Tower Hamlets Sports Foundation continues to deliver the much needed sports programme for youngster in Tower Hamlets?

### **Response from the Mayor**

The THYSF model relies on school's opting to purchase their services and with reducing school budgets this has become more of a challenge for them to sustain.

Over the past year the Council has sought to support the THYSF by writing off its deficit and providing assistance to better understand their financial challenges. This work is continuing however the organisation will need to move to a more sustainable business model if it is to remain viable.

### **9.23 Question from Councillor Gulam Robbani**

As per HMRC's children in the low-income families' local measure, the most basic and a critical set of data set for a local authority and the Government, will the Mayor confirm how many children are currently in this category and what percentage is it of the total children in Tower Hamlets?

### **Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs**

The latest data published by HMRC, for August 2014, indicates that 25,620 children in Tower Hamlets live in poverty – this represents 42 per cent of all children in the borough.

Tower Hamlets has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country which is why we strongly oppose the Government cuts that are hitting boroughs like ours the hardest. The Mayor has invested £5m into a new Tackling Poverty Fund to protect struggling residents and provide schemes to help them into employment, and the Council is also investing £1.75m into free WiFi in our town centres and social housing to ensure residents in low income households can access opportunities online.

### **9.24 Question from Councillor Craig Aston**

Will the Mayor confirm how much S106, CIL and New Homes Bonus cash is sitting in the Councils bank account to help pay to replace the broken play equipment in Ropemakers Fields which is being held up by a lack of funds to pay for replacement equipment?

### **Response from Councillor Abdul Mukit**

As Cllr Aston will know Section 106, CIL and New Homes Bonus are all used to fund varying types of infrastructure, from parks and open space through to housing, schools and GP surgeries across the borough. There are no specific funds hypothecated for Ropemakers Fields however the Council has undertaken a number of improvement works on the site:

- Cut back shrubs and hedges
- Carried out pest control work
- The Parks team will upgrade the current lighting

- Benches will be moved directly under lamp posts so that all seating is overlooked by lighting
- CCTV now installed on Narrow Street entrance, with a second camera planned for the bandstand
- The Council is also consulting on introducing a new Public Spaces Prevention Order to tackle ASB in the area.

Officers are also exploring putting together a capital programme bid to upgrade and replace play equipment across all the parks in the borough.

### **9.25 Question from Councillor Abdul Asad**

Given the damaging impact of the new Council Tax Reduction scheme on self-employed residents and others in the borough will the Mayor now admit that he misled Tower Hamlets when he stated that it was still retaining 100% of the original scheme?

### **Response from Councillor David Edgar**

Tower Hamlets has one of the most generous Council Tax Reduction Schemes in the country and is one of the few places in the country where residents who qualify are still able to receive a deduction of up to 100% for their council tax.

Due to the Conservative Government's introduction of Universal Credit, the data to verify the reported income is no longer available to the council for Universal Credit claimants.

Despite these challenges, we remain absolutely committed to supporting residents and we have worked to protect any self-employed person who is likely to face hardship as a result of the changes. The council is offering a hardship scheme, similar to the Discretionary Housing Payments process, which has the flexibility to write off their council tax contributions where necessary.

The Council is also providing advice and support to anyone adversely affected by this change, including offering to meet individually with all residents affected. Support may include referrals to our partners to provide business support and advice for example the Council's Workpath Service or referrals to advice agencies for support.

## 9.26 Question from Councillor Suluk Ahmed

Will the Mayor tell us:

- What is the level of child poverty in Tower Hamlets?
- What % and numbers of residents currently live in fuel poverty?
- How many households have an income of less than £15,000?
- How many residents have used food-banks and vouchers for each year since 2015 until now?

(Please kindly provide the exact figures and information and not refer to a web-link or report. Thank you)

## Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs

*Thank you for your questions Cllr Ahmed. I am advised that **Part 4** of the Council's Constitution, sections 12.2 & 12.8 state:*

**12.2** – *Subject to rule 12.3, at an Ordinary or Extraordinary meeting of the Council a Member may ask the Speaker, the Mayor, or the Chair of any Committee or Sub-Committee **a question** about any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the borough.*

**12.8** – ***Questions are limited to one per Member per meeting, plus one supplementary question unless the Member has indicated that only a written reply is required and in these circumstances a supplementary question is not permitted.***

However councillors are able to submit Members Enquiries at any time. In light of the above please find below the response to your initial question.

With regards to child poverty the latest data published by HMRC, for August 2014, indicates that 25,620 children in Tower Hamlets live in poverty – this represents 42 per cent of all children in the borough. These statistics are from HM Revenue & Customs and relate to the '*Children in low income families local measure*' which captures the percentage of children falling below the national poverty line (below 60 per cent of median income).

Tower Hamlets has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country which is why we strongly oppose the Government cuts that are hitting boroughs like ours the hardest. The Mayor has invested £5m into a new Tackling Poverty Fund to protect struggling residents and provide schemes to help them into employment, and the Council is also investing £1.75m into free WiFi in our town centres and social housing to ensure residents in low income households can access opportunities online.

## 9.27 Question from Councillor Harun Miah

In relation to housing, will the Mayor tell us:

- How many households are currently on a borough's housing register – and how many of these are in priority categories 1 and 2. How many of these are officially overcrowded?
- How many are in temporary accommodation? Are any in Bed and Breakfast?
- What are the top three furthest places a family on a housing register been accommodated – temporarily or permanently - by the Council since June 2015 and to which areas and when?
- How many properties are under/over occupied at present?
- How many approaches to the Council about homelessness were made – broken down for each year since 2015 – until present. How many of them were already homeless and how many were at the risk of being homeless?
- How many homeless families were/are from the ethnic minorities or from the protected categories under the Public Sector Equality Duty with a breakdown for each category, please?

(Please kindly provide the exact figures and information and not refer to a web-link or report. Thank you)

## Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam

Thank you for your questions Cllr Miah. I am advised that **Part 4** of the Council's Constitution, sections 12.2 & 12.8 state:

**12.2** – *Subject to rule 12.3, at an Ordinary or Extraordinary meeting of the Council a Member may ask the Speaker, the Mayor, or the Chair of any Committee or Sub-Committee **a question** about any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the borough.*

**12.8** – ***Questions are limited to one per Member per meeting, plus one supplementary question unless the Member has indicated that only a written reply is required and in these circumstances a supplementary question is not permitted.***

However councillors are able to submit Members Enquiries at any time. In light of the above please find below the response to your initial question.

There are currently 18,738 on the housing register as of 24<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

Of these:

Band 1 = 1,721 which represents 9.2% of the total figure.

Band 2 = 8,877 which represents 47.4% of the total figure.



### 9.28 Question from Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury

Will the Mayor tell us the crime figures – with numbers and percentages from 2012/13 until now - for the following categories:

- Murders
- Assaults
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Knife Crime
- Islamophobic crime (the Cabinet Member responsible stated at a previous council meeting that these were started to be recorded separately, possibly since 2015/16 but were never confirmed or made public?!) )
- Acid and any kind of chemical attacks

(Kindly do not provide a link, refer to report or that unable to find the information, please provide the precise information requested. This information is very important for community, council and residents. If for any reason it is not available, please find out and make an official request to obtain this information as a matter of urgency and let the members know and include in the minutes and the written answer)

### Response from Councillor Asma Begum

Thank you for your questions Cllr Choudhury. I am advised that **Part 4** of the Council's Constitution, sections 12.2 & 12.8 state:

**12.2** – *Subject to rule 12.3, at an Ordinary or Extraordinary meeting of the Council a Member may ask the Speaker, the Mayor, or the Chair of any Committee or Sub-Committee a **question** about any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the borough.*

**12.8** – ***Questions are limited to one per Member per meeting, plus one supplementary question unless the Member has indicated that only a written reply is required and in these circumstances a supplementary question is not permitted.***

However councillors are able to submit Members Enquiries at any time. In light of the above please find below the response to your initial question.

The only data available to the Council Community Safety Team is via official published websites (Metropolitan Police and Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime). The following data has been extracted from the Met Crime Data Dashboard as of 11<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

The data for the number of murders in Tower Hamlets over previous years is

	Number of offences
April 2010- March 2011	5
April 2011- March 2012	5
April 2012- March 2013	3
April 2013- March 2014	5
April 2014- March 2015	3
April 2015- March 2016	4
April 2016- March 2017	5

### 8.29 Question from Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim

In relation to the cost of living, employment and jobs, will the Mayor inform:

- What is the average cost of living for Tower Hamlets residents now?
- What is average rent in Tower Hamlets at present, and was in 2014?
- What is the long-term youth employment in the borough for each year since 2010 until present?
- Does the Council currently provide the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), Higher Education/University Bursary, PGCE subsidy to teachers from BAME community who are still underrepresented compared to population ratio, if the council does, to how many young people and what are the current budgets? If not, will the Council confirm when were these stopped by the administration, and for which time-periods these three schemes operated for, how many people benefit(ed) from each scheme and what was the total budget for each scheme while in operation?

### Response from Councillor Joshua Peck

*Thank you for your questions Cllr Choudhury. I am advised that **Part 4** of the Council's Constitution, sections 12.2 & 12.8 state:*

**12.2** – *Subject to rule 12.3, at an Ordinary or Extraordinary meeting of the Council a Member may ask the Speaker, the Mayor, or the Chair of any Committee or Sub-Committee **a question** about any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the borough.*

**12.8** – ***Questions are limited to one per Member per meeting, plus one supplementary question unless the Member has indicated that only a written reply is required and in these circumstances a supplementary question is not permitted.***

*However councillors are able to submit Members Enquiries at any time. In light of the above please find below the response to your initial question on the average cost of living in Tower Hamlets.*

To establish an average cost of living for a typical resident or family, one would need to establish what an average family/person spends on all their various outgoings (housing, food, utilities, transport, clothing, recreation etc).

Nationally, these data are collected on the Living Costs and Food Survey run by the Office for National Statistics. The survey is a UK household survey, designed to provide information on household expenditure patterns and food – the results are published on the ONS website in their Family Spending in the UK. These do highlight the higher level of spending among families in London. The latest data shows that across the London region the average household expenditure is £572 including housing costs.

As far as we are aware, no similar survey or exercise has been undertaken for Tower Hamlets, so there are no data readily available at a borough level.

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