

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL****HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2017****THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG****Members Present:**

Mayor John Biggs	Councillor Shafiqul Haque
Councillor Khaled Uddin Ahmed	Councillor Clare Harrison
Councillor Rajib Ahmed	Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Shafi Ahmed	Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Suluk Ahmed	Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Ohid Ahmed	Councillor Aminur Khan
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Mahbub Alam	Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Shah Alam	Councillor Ayas Miah
Councillor Amina Ali	Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Abdul Asad	Councillor Md. Maium Miah
Councillor Craig Aston	Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah
Councillor Asma Begum	Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Rachel Blake	Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim
Councillor Chris Chapman	Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Dave Chesterton	Councillor John Pierce
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury	Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor Andrew Cregan	Councillor Gulam Robbani
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

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

During the meeting, the Council agreed to vary the order of business. To aid clarity, the Minutes are presented in the order that the items originally appeared on the agenda. The order the business was taken in at the meeting was as follows:

- Item 1 - Apologies for absence.
- Item 2 – Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.
- Item 3 – Minutes.
- Item 4 – Announcements.
- Item 5.1 – 5.4 – Petitions.
- Item 6 – Public Questions.
- Item 7 – Mayor’s Report.
- Item 12.12 - Motion on NJC Pay.

- Item 8.1 – Members Questions.
- Item 12.4 - Motion in support of foster carers.
- Item 8.2 – Members Questions.
- Item 9 – Reports from the Executive and the Council’s Committees.
- Item 9.1 - Standards (Advisory) Committee - Re-Appointment of Independent Co-opted Member
- Item 10 – Reports and Questions on Joint Arrangements/External Organisations.
- Item 11 – Other Business.
- Item 11.1 - Late Night Levy Determination.
- Item 11.2 – Update to the Mayor's Executive Scheme of Delegation.
- Item 11.3 - Election of Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Speaker of the Council brought the Council up to date with some of her activities since the previous Council meeting. She reported that she had attended an event at Billingsgate to receive the annual traditional rent payment, which was donated to charity and had become a Dementia Friend,

She had also welcomed the crew of two visiting ships from Peru and Brazil to the Borough, participated in the Charity Dragon Boat Challenge, the annual Great River Race challenge and had attended a 100th birthday celebration. She had also attended the Sea Cadets National Band Competition at the Tower of London and the Merchant Navy Day Commemorative Service at Trinity Square Gardens.

She also reported that she had enjoyed some of the Council’s summer activities, many community events, including citizenship and award ceremonies and had visited a number of important local services including the Richard House Children’s Hospice, the young peoples’ service in Whites Row and the older peoples’ service in John Sinclair Court.

She thanked all those who had participated in the activities.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Julia Dockerill
- Councillor Shiria Khatun

Apologies for lateness were received on behalf of Councillors Rachel Blake, John Pierce and Abdul Asad.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

The Council’s Monitoring Officer reported that she had granted a dispensation to all Councillors in relation to Agenda item 12.12 (Motion on NJC Pay). The dispensation had been granted on the basis that the Members’ Allowance Scheme included an uplift to reflect any annual pay settlement for local government staff. The dispensation had been granted as it met the criteria set

out in law. Members were advised that they were able to stay in the meeting room, participate and vote on the motion.

Councillor Denise Jones declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 8.21, a Member Question relating to local businesses as she had a business in the Borough. She stated she would leave the room for the duration of that item, however, the question was not reached during the meeting.

Councillor Peter Golds declared a Non Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda item 12.12, Motion on NJC Pay as he had served on a negotiating Panel on behalf of the Local Government Association. Councillor Golds left the meeting room for the consideration of this item.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 19 July 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 expressed regret at the recent incident on the District Line and was thankful that there were no fatalities. On behalf of the Council, she sent best wishes to all those hurt or impacted by the attack and thanked the London Transport officers and emergency services who responded so quickly to the incident.

The Speaker also offered her condolences to all those affected by recent events in Rakhine. She stated that the community should do all it could to support those affected

The Chief Executive, Will Tuckley provided an update on recent developments at the Council. He advised that over the summer, the Council welcomed the Home Secretary to discuss tackling extremism, and had met with the Children's Minister to look at child care issues and the Mayor of London to look at housing issues. The Council had also received the final Direction from the Department for Education in respect of children's social care and the first monitoring visit from Ofsted which had gone well. In addition, it was also announced that the Council would pilot improvements to the postal vote process in conjunction with the Cabinet Office.

Procedural Motion

Councillor Oliur Rahman **moved** and Councillor Mahbub Alam **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.14, Rule 13.1 be suspended to enable an urgent motion regarding the New Direction from the Secretary of State of Education about failure of Tower Hamlets Children

Services to be considered". The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **defeated**

5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

5.1 Petition regarding PCNs and vehicle removal

Sumsul Talukder Tareq addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Anima Ali, Cabinet Member for Environment then responded to the matters raised in the petition. She briefly outlined the Council's approach to vehicle removal and the use of waiting restrictions, including the key features of the most recent changes to the regulations to prioritise the removal of vehicles in reserved bays. She also explained that the Council were working to improve parking service's webpages and stated that she was happy to meet with the petitioner to discuss specific concerns.

RESOLVED:

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

5.2 Petition regarding Play on Sports

Callum Wear addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE Cabinet Member for Culture and Youth then responded to the matters raised in the petition. He advised that Play on Sports was a private company and at present no suitable facilities in the Borough were available for the organisation. Should a suitable site become available, it would need to be advertised in accordance with the Council's procurement procedures. However, he was happy to meet the petitioners to discuss their work.

RESOLVED:

1. That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Children's , for a written response within 28 days.

5.3 Petition regarding ASB and RSLs

Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaquim addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Asma Begum Cabinet Member for Community Safety then responded to the matters raised in the petition. Councillor Begum explained that addressing Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) was a key commitment of the administration given the impact that such issues had on the community. To address such problems, the Council had developed an ASB strategy with specific focus on addressing ASB in the areas identified in the petition in partnership with key stakeholders. The Council had also provided additional funding for the Council's ASB team, supported patrols of crime hotspots and had provided funding for additional Police Officers amongst other measures.

RESOLVED:

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

5.4 Petition Debate – No to new parking restrictions for residents and local businesses by Tower Hamlets Council

The Council approved a change to the Council's Petition Scheme in respect of the standard format for Petition Debates at Council to allow Councillors to put questions to the petitioners for a maximum of four minutes.

Fazleh Elaahi and other petitioners addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. The Council then debated the matters raised by the petition and Mayor John Biggs responded to the issues raised. The Mayor outlined the scope of the recent consultation on parking matters and the nature of some of the issues raised. He reported that he had no intention of extending parking hours in the Borough unless there was overwhelming support for the particular changes to be made. He also stated that he was willing to meet with Councillors from all parties to take forward the issues raised.

RESOLVED:

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

6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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

6.1 Question from from Adam Allnutt:

The Council recently announced funding for 14 new police officers – how will these officers be used in the borough?

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

Recently the Mayor announced £1.5m funding for 14 new police officers to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour on council estates. There will be 12 constables and 2 sergeants. The Mayor and I also announced at Cabinet last night new funding for an extra 19 Police Officers, on top of the 14 already announced. This will bring the total number of Council funded Officers to 39. They will be joining Tower Hamlets Homes staff in a joint anti-social behaviour team – the first of its kind in the borough. The new officers will have a particular focus on drug dealing and drug misuse. They will carry out uniformed patrols, Stop and Searches, Issuing ASB warnings, enforcement of disposal zones, weapons sweeps, security checks of blocks and bin stores,

door knocking, attending TRA meetings and carrying out home visits. They will take on the persistent offenders who are making life a misery for residents. These officers should be on our streets from this month.

Supplementary question from Adam Allnutt:

I was recently attacked by one of these roaming groups of men who commit anti - social behaviour around the borough. It was on Millharbour which is meant to be a safer part of the borough. With central Government cuts we have seen an end to community policing. How long can councils fill in for central Government cuts to these police services which are essential?

Councillor Begum's, response to supplementary question:

I am sorry to hear about your incident. You're absolutely right that the Government has slashed police budgets and expects local councils to step in to 'fill the gap'. While we do what we can, like funding extra officers, we simply cannot replace every officer that the Government scraps. Police numbers fell for the seventh consecutive year in July. Police forces in England and Wales are now at their lowest strength per head on record. Tower Hamlets Council will continue to fund additional officers, and we're looking at funding even more, but the Government needs to properly fund our police services.

6.2 Question from Shohidur Rahman:

Many residents are concerned about anti-social behaviour associated with the use of laughing gas. What is the council doing about this?

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

We recently launched a 'No Laughing Matter' campaign working with partners including local Police and Tower Hamlets Homes to tackle the problems caused by Nitrous Oxide. The Council's ground breaking campaign 'No Laughing Matter' includes:

- Educating people about laughing gas.
- Urging residents to report traders selling it for human consumption.
- Working closely with trading standards and the police to close down outlets.
- Providing residents with ways to report discarded canisters.
- Talking to school children about the dangers of nitrous oxide.

In addition, as I just mentioned, the Mayor announced in Cabinet last night, extra funding for 19 Police Officers on top of the 14.

(No supplementary question was asked).

6.3 Question from Abukor Essa:

What action is the Council taking to address poor air quality in Tower Hamlets?

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

Thanks for raising this important issue. 9000 Londoners die each because of poor air quality. So it is urgent that we tackle this now. Living in London and living in the borough this is a matter of justice. This is about inequality as people living in deprived areas have poorer air quality. 48% of our residents live in areas of unacceptable air quality. 48% of our schools are in areas of unacceptable air quality. Two of the most polluted schools in London are in Tower Hamlets, so it is urgent that we take action. We in Tower Hamlets and the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, are taking action, unlike other parts of London and the previous administration here, we take this issue very seriously. We consulted widely on our Air Quality Action Plan and have received 153 responses, 86% were residents. We are already taking the following actions:

- Electric vehicle charging, for which we approved plans last night.
- Increasing provisions for walking and cycling.
- Investing in measures in schools to encourage children to walk to school.
- Raising awareness of pollution and encouraging people to make small changes to day to day journeys.
- Leading by example by upgrading our own Council fleet and ensuring that our new civic centre has low impact on air quality and
- Lobbying the Government for stronger national action on air quality.

We need to work together across London with the Mayor of London on this issue. What we need is further action from national Government to help us really tackle this issue.

Supplementary question from Abukor Essa:

Councillor Peter Golds earlier mentioned particularly Woolmore Primary School, which is about 400-500 yards from where I live. Although it's a London issue, this area - the Isle of Dogs near Blackwall tunnel is one of the worst affected areas in terms of air pollution. Is there any specific targeting for the problem in that area?

Councillor Blake's response to supplementary question:

Yes we do target the areas that are worst affected. We focus our monitoring stations on the areas worst affected, and then we have other monitors distributed around the borough, that can monitor the overall level of air pollution in the borough. We can also share with everybody methods of identifying where pollution is worst in the Borough at any one time. As you

rightly said, the A13 and the A12 corridors are some of the most affected areas and they are surrounded by some of our most deprived communities. That is why this is an issue about social justice and it's important that we tackle this so that the children growing up in those areas do not have their lungs damaged at such an early age, because national Government is not prepared to take the action that we need to be taken.

I think the most interesting thing about the local action that you are requesting is that the residents who responded to the consultation are asking us to do more. They want us to tackle emissions from canal boats, they think we need more action to reduce traffic volume and to tackle engine idling. There is a real demand out there that we tackle this issue, so I think that we should listen to the people that have responded to our consultation, listen to the people who came to our consultation event over the summer and make this air quality action plan strong so that we stop children living around the A12 and A13, from having their lungs damaged by air pollution in Tower Hamlets because it's not fair. This is something that we as a Labour Party within Tower Hamlets Council are determined to tackle.

6.4 Question from Victoria Obaze:

How many affordable homes were delivered in 2016?

Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:

Affordable housing is a top priority for this administration and we are delighted to confirm that a City Hall report revealed that Tower Hamlets saw more affordable housing built than any other borough in London (2015/16).

Up to date Council figures show that in Tower Hamlets more than 1,070 affordable homes were built last year (2016/17) and another 1,073 the year before (2015/16).

Alongside his pledge to build 1,000 council homes in coming years, Mayor Biggs established the Tower Hamlets Affordability Commission last year which resulted in the decision earlier this year to introduce lower rents for new council and affordable housing saving residents up to £6,000 a year.

The very high cost of housing, a chronic shortage of stock and a growing population all mean considerable challenges in providing affordable housing. These encouraging figures highlight the massive progress made in fulfilling one of Mayor Biggs' key priorities.

Supplementary question from Victoria Obaze:

What affordable housing is planned for the future?

Councillor Islam's response to supplementary question:

We continue to be committed to providing affordable housing for residents. Last week the Mayor and I alongside other Councillors were joined by the

Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, to unveil another 150 homes in Watts Grove - a new rented affordable housing split between Tower Hamlets Living Rents and London Affordable Rent, which is the equivalent of social rent. This scheme was earmarked for scrapping by ex-Mayor Lutfur Rahman and former Cabinet Member for Housing Councillor Khan but reinstated in 2013 after a strong local campaign led by Labour Councillors and John Biggs. As part of the next phase of this important programme, we have identified four such sites in the borough which will provide more new affordable homes for local families. We are also well on our way to providing 1000 Council houses, since the start of this administration.

6.5 Question from Dipa Das

How many residents in low income households in Tower Hamlets don't have access to WiFi?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

In Tower Hamlets, 24% of residents living in low income households do not have access to Wi-Fi. 45% of those aged over 50 do not have access to Wi-Fi; 40% of residents with disabilities do not have access to Wi-Fi. We will be arranging free digital training for residents so that they can have access to the infrastructure and develop the skills to use free Wi-Fi. Just to be clear in case people think that this is some sort of gimmick, the Council will actually make money not out of residents but from the providers who have been bidding to provide this service for us and they will be providing on top of that the free access to local residents. On top of that, we are very clear that this forms a part of our communications strategy for making sure that we get what is called channel shift - that is getting more people to access Council services on line. It's also about social exclusion so it's about making sure that people who are information poor have access to Wi-Fi and can participate more fully in this increasingly electronic age.

Supplementary question from Dipa Das:

Will the free Wi - Fi benefit businesses in the local area?

Mayor Biggs response to supplementary question:

Yes. Over 800 businesses in Brick Lane, Watney Market and Chrisp Street town centres and over 130,000 residents living within 800 metres of these centres, will benefit from this first phase. It's not designed to subsidise more comprehensive business use, but about ensuring in particular that small businesses can have access to the internet to help them be more efficient in the way they do things like, procurement, gathering information and so on. I think it is a progressive move, which is obviously why I have proposed it.

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 the Conservative Group, responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

Procedural Motion

Councillor Danny Hassell **moved** and Councillor Sirajul Islam, **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied such that agenda item 12.12 Motion regarding NJC Pay be taken as the next item of business". The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

At the request of Councillor Danny Hassell, the Speaker allowed a representative of a trade union to make a short statement on the motion during the debate.

8. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

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

8.1 Question from from Councillor Danny Hassell:

Will the Mayor join me in thanking foster carers across the borough for their tireless work and dedication with some of our most vulnerable young people?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

Yes. Foster carers deserve our utmost thanks. They give dedication and they do it not for the reward but because they care passionately about our community and serving local people. Councillor Whitelock Gibbs and I recently wrote a letter to our foster carers All of whom, I think were shocked by the newspaper coverage and the way in which it portrayed them in an inaccurate and pejorative fashion and passed judgments which were very critical and undermined the dedication they show. As a Council, we should be unanimous in supporting our foster carers who provide dedicated support. They are tireless and they support and care for our children at traumatic times in their lives and they deserve to feel safe and supported and valued. I for one as Mayor of this Borough value our foster carers and encourage others to come forward and we will work tirelessly to ensure that children in our care are looked after properly.

(No supplementary question was asked)

Procedural Motion

Mayor John Biggs **moved** and Councillor Sirajul Islam, **seconded**, a procedural motion “that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied such that agenda item 12. 4 Motion in support of foster carers be taken as the next item of business”. The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

8.2 Question from Councillor Ohid Ahmed:

In response to concerns raised about the potential closure of One Stop Shops in the borough, the Mayor stated “We are consulting residents on proposals to merge our One Stop Shop and Idea Stores. This is not, obviously, a proposal to shut One Stop Shops. Indeed a new one will open, it is planned, as part of the Isle of Dogs Idea Store site.” Considering this comment, will the Mayor confirm that the 4 One Stop Shops (Bow, Chrisp Street, Watney Market and Bethnal Green) will continue to operate as they are with stand-alone One Stop service for residents, and not close down?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

We are consulting on a proposal that was considered as part of our budget proposals for the next three years. We believe that by merging the One Stop Shops and Idea Stores, we will achieve both efficiencies and a better quality service. If I could focus on the current One Stop Shop in Chrisp Street for example, it’s in a pretty inadequate premises and by moving it into the idea store, we think we can provide a better service for residents. By providing a One Stop Shop ideally in a better location as part of a combined operation on the Isle of Dogs, we will be providing residents there with a service they don’t currently receive on the island. We already have combined effectively the One Stop Shop and Idea Store at Watney Market. The one that I remain particularly anxious about is the one in Bethnal Green and as part of the current proposal that might move to Whitechapel. It’s a genuine consultation and there is no predetermination. We will see what the public consultation says. The answer to your question is that we are now in a flat earth situation and we are in a £58million savings situation. But we think that we can improve the quality of services and accessibility to services for residents by including a better internet presence to residents, counter services and by better providing our services more corporately as an Authority.

Supplementary question from Councillor Ahmed:

About 1000 residents visit the One Stop Shops on a daily basis. I go to Chrisp Street Market quite often as this is where I hold my surgery. Every time I go I can see people queuing up for advice. So how do you think that particularly the elderly people and people who who don’t speak English as a first language are going to be able to use the service, particularly the online service you are referring to?

Mayor John Biggs', response to supplementary question:

I said very clearly that we are not closing the One Stop Shops, therefore people will continue to be able to access the same level of service and we expect to be able to provide an improved service as a result of these changes. I appreciate the point you make about people who may not have English literacy and may not have English as a first language and the service will reach out to them to meet the needs of those residents. We need to focus on people who need a counter service in particular and we need to move people as far as possible to other means of contacting the Council which are more efficient and satisfactory for them and work better for the whole community.

Questions 8.3 - 30 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.)

9. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES**9.1 Standards (Advisory) Committee - Re-Appointment of Independent Co-opted Member**

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer proposing the re-appointment of an Independent Co-Opted Member to the Standards (Advisory) Committee. The recommendation was put to the vote under the guillotine procedure at Council Procedure Rule 9.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the re-appointment of Mr John Pulford as an Independent Co-opted Member of the Standards (Advisory) Committee for a period of two years be approved.

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

There was no business to transact under this agenda item.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

11.1 Late Night Levy Determination

The Council consider the report of the Acting Corporate Director, Place seeking determination of the Late Night Levy. The recommendations were put to the vote under the guillotine procedure at Council Procedure Rule 9.

RESOLVED:

That the Council agree:

1. That the Late Night Levy be adopted;
2. That the commencement of the levy shall be from 1st January 2018.
3. That the commencement period of the levy should be from midnight every night.
4. That the income from the levy, less collection costs, should be allocated through the Community Safety Partnership.
5. That Members of the Best Bar None Scheme receive a 30% reduction from the levy.
6. That the following premises would be exempt from the levy:
 - Premises with overnight accommodation where alcohol is supplied only to persons staying at the premises during midnight to 6am for consumption on the premises
 - Theatres and Cinemas: this exemption applies if alcohol is served during the levied hours only for consumption on the premises to ticket holders, participants in the production or invited guests to private events; they must be bona-fide theatres or cinemas and the sale of alcohol must not be their primary purpose
 - Bingo Halls
 - Community Amateur Sports Clubs: These are clubs registered as Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC)
 - Community premises: these are premises that form part of the church hall, chapel hall, village hall, parish hall, community hall or other similar buildings.
 - Premises opening past midnight for New Years Eve only: applicable to premises which are authorised to sell alcohol between midnight and 6am, only applies on New Years day

7. That the following licenced premises would not be exempt from the levy, as :

- Country Village Pubs
- Premises in Business Improvement Districts
- Premises that receive a small business rate relief

11.2 Update to the Mayor's Executive Scheme of Delegation

The Council considered proposed updates to the Mayor's Executive Scheme of Delegation. The recommendation was put to the vote under the guillotine procedure at Council Procedure Rule 9.

RESOLVED:

1. That the updated Mayor's Executive Decision Making Scheme be noted

11.3 Election of Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Council were invited to appoint a Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The recommendation was put to the vote under the guillotine procedure at Council Procedure Rule 9.

Councillor Clare Harrisson **moved** and Councillor Danny Hassell **seconded** a proposal that Councillor Dave Chesterton be appointed as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The nomination was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED:

1. That Councillor Dave Chesterton be appointed as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

12.4 Motion in support of foster carers

Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs **moved** and Mayor John Biggs **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda.

Councillor Andrew Wood **moved** and Councillor Oliur Rahman **seconded** the following amendment to the motion

“Delete all after 1 in the opening section and insert

2. That following the highly critical Ofsted Report published on Friday 7th April the Secretary of State using powers under Section 497A (4B) of the Education Act, 1996 imposed statutory directions to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in relation to Children's services.

3. That after this Council's Children's Services failed its OFSTED Inspection that those responsible for the service were moved sideways, stayed in post or have taken a secondment elsewhere but nobody has lost their job.
4. That whereas the OFSTED failure was a surprise to this Council it was in part due to the culture of the service.
5. That this service failure may be identified elsewhere within the Council.
6. That concerns relating to childcare were further revealed in the extensive publicity concerning the fostering of Child AB as revealed in the Family Court of East London.
7. It is reported that the biological mother of the child raised issues, in Court, as the suitability of the foster placement and that the child was reported as being distressed.
8. It is reported that certain controversial statements were referred to in Court which were attributed to the initial foster carers.

The Council;

Reiterates that foster parents in Tower Hamlets and countrywide undertake extremely difficult tasks in caring for often confused and vulnerable children.

Calls upon the Intervention Advisers appointed by the Secretary of State to undertake an investigation into the accuracy of these allegations.

In the event of the allegations being correct then the Council removes the persons concerned from the Register of Foster Parents to ensure the credibility and reputation of the service in Tower Hamlets.

The Council further notes

The Ofsted report noted a significant decline in the standard of delivery of Children's Services since the last inspection in 2012 when the borough standard was rated Good.

The Council had reports available to them from the Contact Centre where the young girl expressed her concerns in the presence of those supervising officers. Answers need to be given about what the Council did after reading these reports.

The Council calls upon the Mayor

To concentrate on the delivery of an improved service as required by the Statutory Directions and by ensuring that the concerns are properly investigated, provide parents, residents and Foster carers that the service operates to the highest level".

Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs declined to accept this amendment to the motion. The amendment was put to the vote and was **defeated**.

Councillor Rabina Khan **moved** and Councillor Aminur Khan **seconded** the following friendly amendment to the motion:

- (a) Under 'Believes 4' replace 'many will see' with ' we see'
- (b) Under 'Resolves' add '3. To instruct the Chief Executive to report the Times and the Daily Mail to IPSO on the grounds of Clause 1 (Accuracy), Clause 2 (Privacy), Clause 6 (Children) and Clause 12 (Discrimination)

Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs and Mayor John Biggs accepted the amendment and altered their motion accordingly:

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

RESOLVED:

This Council notes:

1. The story first published in The Times newspaper concerning a child in a Tower Hamlets foster placement, which has seen significant media attention in the UK and internationally.
2. The unprecedented publication of the court report confirms that while foster placements will always require judgement and will rarely achieve a perfect fit, the judgement of our officers was sensitive and makes clear The Times' reporting was intrusive to both the child and her foster family.
3. That many foster carers feel their work and value have been questioned and undermined as a result of negative media coverage.
4. That immediately following the publication of the Times article Mayor Biggs and Cllr Whitelock Gibbs met with a group of concerned foster carers.

This Council believes:

1. The media's portrayal of foster carers is deeply misguided and harmful to the recruitment and retention of carers.
2. That foster carers are dedicated individuals, who work tirelessly and provide the highest levels of care and support for some of our most vulnerable young people.
3. That child protection and safeguarding is a complex area but this nuance and sensitivity has been lost in the distorted and sensationalist media coverage.

4. The reporting in the Times article and its reinterpretation by other media showed a crude and judgemental stereotyping which we see as being Islamophobic, by attaching prejudices and implied motives and using intrusively stereotyped views of a foster carer who happened to be of Muslim faith.
5. Foster carers deserve to feel safe, supported and valued.

This Council welcomes:

1. The caution exercised by the political and corporate leadership in engaging with the public debate, to protect the safety and identity of the child first and foremost.
2. The public statements from Mayor John Biggs in support of our foster carers and calling out the Islamophobic tone of much of the media coverage.

This Council resolves:

1. To welcome the work Mayor John Biggs and the Lead Member, Cllr Whitelock Gibbs, have undertaken to show support for our foster carers.
2. To continue to support foster carers in their vital work and to work with them to promote the positive difference they make in our borough and to our young people.
3. To instruct the Chief Executive to report the Times and the Daily Mail to IPSO on the grounds of Clause 1 (Accuracy), Clause 2 (Privacy), Clause 6 (Children) and Clause 12 (Discrimination)

12. 12 Motion regarding on NJC Pay

Councillor Rachel Blake **moved** and Councillor Danny Hassell **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda.

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

RESOLVED:

This Council notes that:

1. NJC basic pay has fallen by 21% since 2010 in real terms
2. NJC workers had a three-year pay freeze from 2010-2012
3. Local terms and conditions of many NJC employees have also been cut, impacting on their overall earnings
4. NJC pay is the lowest in the public sector

5. Job evaluated pay structures are being squeezed and distorted by bottom-loaded NJC pay settlements needed to reflect the increased National Living Wage and the Foundation Living Wage
6. There are growing equal and fair pay risks resulting from this situation

This Council therefore supports the NJC pay claim for 2018, submitted by UNISON, GMB and Unite on behalf of council and school workers and calls for the immediate end of public sector pay restraint. NJC pay cannot be allowed to fall further behind other parts of the public sector. This council also welcomes the joint review of the NJC pay spine to remedy the turbulence caused by bottom-loaded pay settlements.

This Council also notes the drastic ongoing cuts to local government funding and calls on the Government to provide additional funding to fund a decent pay rise for NJC employees and the pay spine review.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Call immediately on the LGA to make urgent representations to Government to fund the NJC claim and the pay spine review and notify us of their action in this regard;
2. Call on the Mayor to write to the Prime Minister and Chancellor supporting the NJC pay claim and seeking additional funding to fund a decent pay rise and the pay spine review;
3. Call on the Mayor to meet with local NJC union representatives to convey support for the pay claim and the pay spine review.

Motions 1-3 and 5-11 and 13-19 were not debated due to lack of time.

The meeting ended at 10.03 p.m.

Speaker of the Council

APPENDIX A – WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS THAT WERE NOT PUT AT THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING (20 SEPTEMBER 2017)

8.3 Question from Councillor Rachael Saunders:

How many care leavers living in and outside of Tower Hamlets will benefit from the Mayor's new policy to exempt care leavers from paying council tax?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs

I'm very proud we have chosen to give care leavers the best start in adult life by exempting them from Council Tax until they are 25 years old. As councillors we are the corporate parents for all children in care – like any parents, we want to give our young people a helping hand as they become independent.

We are in the process of updating the list of care leavers to include new cases. At the time Cabinet agreed the proposal, there were 324 care leavers.

When a young person leaves care and begins to manage their own financial affairs for the first time, they can easily fall into debt, especially without vital advice and practical support from family. National charity The Children's Society has highlighted this and we're pleased to support their campaign.

This is a relatively small cost for the council to fund this exemption but it can have a huge impact on the lives of those leaving our care. We've already had feedback from some care leavers about the massive difference this decision will make to their lives.

Based on our analysis, a care leaver living on their own in a B&B property would be set to save over £700 (£725) per year off their council tax bills up to age 25.

Without the family support many young people get as they become adults, care leavers often struggle to manage their household bills and make ends meet. Many find themselves in debt, or having to go without food or other basic necessities.

We're delighted that Tower Hamlets Council has taken this vital step and we would urge more Councils, in London and beyond, to follow suit.

8.4 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood

Did both foster parents of the little girl fostered in the news recently match the child's "religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background." Simple yes or no answers for each category and foster family would be sufficient given the reporting restrictions

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs

You will be well aware that this is subject to significant legal restrictions on what can be discussed and published. Even more importantly, I'm sure you share my view that our priority must be to protect the identity and safety of the young girl in question above all else, and indeed her family and foster families.

All our foster parents are trained to respond to children's needs as identified in their care plan. There is not a requirement that they have to match all the identified needs but they must be able to respond and ensure that the appropriate care is given to a child. Keeping a child local to family, networks and school is a crucial factor and all foster carers are trained to support children from a range of backgrounds. You may have seen that recently the case was again heard in court, and it was reported that the child concerned had a "warm and appropriate" relationship with the foster carers.

Both the Corporate Director and I have offered Members the opportunity to discuss the case more fully in a confidential setting. You would also benefit from reading the Family Court statement but be assured that we have examined very closely the allegations and facts of this case.

8.5 Question from Councillor Shiria Khatun

Can the lead member update councillors on the latest exam results?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs

There have been numerous changes to the exams this year, but I am pleased to say that Tower Hamlets schools continue to perform well and improve their results. I would like to congratulate all our young people for their achievements.

At GCSE level, early interim data from 13 out of the 16 schools in Tower Hamlets show that under the new grade structure, those attaining grade 4 or above in English and Mathematics is 65.9%.

This is not strictly comparable to the old measure but does show that attainment in these subjects has improved (the percentage attaining grades A*-C in English and mathematics in 2016 was 63.3%).

At A Level, early and provisional data from 13 out of the 15 schools and colleges in Tower Hamlets show that the percentage of students achieving 3 A Levels A*-E has risen to over 80 percent, whilst the percentage of students that have studied 3 A Levels and have achieved 2 A grades and a B grade or higher in at least 2 facilitating subjects, has also risen this year.

The vast majority of local schools subscribe to the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP) as they recognise the benefits of working within a strong family of schools. THEP is supporting the development of system leadership, brokering school to school support and the sharing of resources across local schools, as well as providing intensive intervention in the very few schools of concern in the borough. We're proud to still have a high number of maintained schools in the borough and that most academies and free schools want to be part of THEP and work together.

The Primary School Improvement Team have been seconded to the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership since the 1st of September 2017 and the Council is supporting THEP to secure appropriate capacity to support secondary schools in a similar way. Key performance indicators have been agreed to hold the THEP to account with regard to their performance and a governance structure has been agreed.

8.6 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan

Will the Mayor commit to Rent Controls in the Private Rented Sector throughout the borough?

Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam

The Council has no legal powers to control the rents charged by private landlords.

Any form of mandatory rent control would require primary legislation on the part of Parliament at Westminster. I urge the Government to examine the benefit of such measures in tackling the affordability crisis.

The Council is determined, however, to use all the powers that are at its disposal to protect private renters in Tower Hamlets. We recently launched the Tower Hamlets Private Renters' Charter, which clearly sets out tenants' legal rights and also the steps that the Council and its partners will take to enforce them.

In the last twelve months we have also revived the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum, which promotes best practice and provides landlords and agents with regular legal, regulatory and policy updates to make sure good landlords are complying with the rules.

The council also works with the GLA, and is currently contributing to the development of the Mayor of London's Housing Strategy. The Draft Housing Strategy includes a commitment to develop a more secure, stable, and affordable private rented sector.

I would reiterate that local authorities have no legal powers to control the rents charged by private landlords, but the Government should carry out a thorough assessment of such a policy. If we had such powers we would of course consider exercising them as we are clear that the effects of rent rises are pricing people out of our borough.

8.7 Question from Councillor John Pierce

What assessment has been made of the cladding of the PFI block behind Poplar Baths?

Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam

The cladding system on Randall House has failed the advanced testing carried out by the BRE. Information on this testing can be found on the DCLG website.

The block is not owned by the Council – it was built under the previous Mayor using a private finance initiative (PFI) deal.

The Council has a duty of care to our tenants in the block and we are doing everything we can to ensure their safety.

Folera have advised the Council and the DCLG in August 2017 that they have agreed the following actions –

1. Replace all existing ACM materials from the external fabric of the building at the earliest time frame
2. Architects are at design stage for a replacement cladding system
3. Folera are currently awaiting on two fire consultant reports on the proposed replacement materials and on existing cladding to balconies and finishes
4. Folera's appointed cladding contractor is on standby to mobilise at short notice along with their preferred scaffold contractor

Folera are due to update the council on the programme shortly and we will keep residents informed with any developments.

8.8 Question from Councillor Oliur Rahman

Will the Mayor provide the latest update about the foster child, looked after by Tower Hamlets Council, about whom a front-page news story was recently published by a national newspaper, The Times, as well as other prominent media outlets?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs

You will be well aware that this is subject to significant legal restrictions on what can be discussed and published. I'm sure you share my view that our priority must be to protect the identity and safety of the young girl in question above all else, and indeed her family and foster families.

The child as identified by the redacted court judgement is in the care of grandparents as was the plan of the local authority. We are not able to give any further details.

Both the Corporate Director and I have offered Members the opportunity to discuss the case more fully in a confidential setting. I refer you to the earlier answer (8.4) on the agenda.

8.9 Question from Councillor Ayas Miah:

How many families are housed by the Council in B&B accommodation for longer than the legal 6 week limit?

Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam

Currently no families who may be owed a duty under the Housing Acts are housed by the Council in B&B accommodation longer than the legal 6 week limit.

We work very hard to avoid the need to place families in B&Bs at all, but sometimes it is necessary to place them in B&Bs for a short term emergency placement. Where we do have to place families in B&Bs, we are very clear that this needs to be for the shortest possible time.

When Mayor Biggs was elected in June 2015, he inherited the country's worst performing local authority for housing families in B&Bs longer than the legal 6 week limit. Shamefully, at its peak in 2015 the Council housed 174 families in B&Bs for longer than 6 weeks.

I'm very glad that after a lot of work and investment, we've brought this figure down to zero.

The previous administration left families to languish in B&Bs and we're not going to follow their example.

8.10 Question from Councillor Chris Chapman

Did the little girl in contact centre reports provide a clear indication of her wishes as regards her fostering arrangements and did the Council give "due consideration.....to such wishes and feelings of the child as they have been able to ascertain?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs

You will be well aware that this matter is subject to significant legal restrictions on what can be discussed and published. Our priority must be to protect the identity and safety of the young girl in question above all else, and indeed her family and foster families.

The views of children are taken by social workers, with regards to their placement. However the weight given to a child's wishes and feelings is dependent on their age and maturity. The child in this case is 5 years of age.

I would also note that the Children's Guardian, who is an independent official appointed by the court to protect the interests of the child, found 'there were no concerns as to the child's welfare and she reports that the child is settled and well cared for by the foster carer'. She had visited both placements and assessed that the child was happy and settled with both carers.

Both the Corporate Director and I have offered Members the opportunity to discuss

the case more fully in a confidential setting. I refer you to the earlier answer (8.4) on the agenda.

8.11 Question from Councillor Dave Chesterton:

Can the cabinet member tell me what impact the Private Renters' Charter will make to residents in private rented accommodation?

Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam

The Charter and the campaign around it will raise standards for private renters across the borough.

The Charter sets out clearly the standards that all private renters can expect in the borough, and also the steps that the Council and its community partners will take to enforce those standards.

The Charter will have a positive impact across the borough's 46,000 private renting households. However, this impact will be particularly beneficial for those tenants that currently have the least understanding of their rights. These are disproportionately the most vulnerable and excluded private tenants, including recent migrants, young people, and those in relative poverty.

The Charter will be at the centre of an ongoing campaign, reaching out not only to private renters, but also to landlords and agents – especially the 'amateur' or 'accidental' landlords who do not understand their responsibilities. Alongside this, the Council will take robust enforcement action where landlords breach standards.

Ultimately the Charter aims to change the culture of private renting in the borough to one where poor conditions and poor management are unacceptable.

Further, in the last twelve months we have revived the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum and we are working with the forum towards those goals. The forum promotes best practice and provides landlords and agents with regular legal, regulatory and policy updates – and enables landlords and agents actively to feed into the Council's policy development.

The Charter is actively supported by all the key agent and landlord bodies: Residential Landlords Association, National Landlords Association, Association of Residential Letting Agents, and National Approved Lettings Scheme.

The strategy for the first year of the Private Renters' Charter is to establish and begin to embed awareness across the borough. After the planned extensive campaign is completed after the first year, we will consider the options for developing the charter as a simple charter-mark for landlords and agents. Alongside that we will begin actively to highlight and celebrate the work of the best and most improving agents and landlords.

The Council actively supports the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme which trains landlords to be compliant with the law and best practice. The council makes financial contributions to the scheme, incentivises landlords to become accredited and sits on the scheme's steering group. In the last twelve months we have begun

hosting quarterly accreditation training days at Albert Jacob House.

8.12 Question from Councillor Abdul Asad;

Why has the Mayor made an Individual Mayoral Decision outside of a Cabinet meeting to award a £3.5 million contract to consultants as part the transformation programme?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) agreed a report in June 2016 which detailed the business case for establishing a Corporate Programme Management Function to support the Council's Savings Programme.

The paper also detailed the need to secure a strategic partner to provide additional support and external specialist expertise in delivering large scale transformational changes.

A competitive procurement process tested the market through an appropriate national framework for professional consultancy services, and as a result the day rate agreed is below those already competitively priced within that framework added further value for money in terms of the pricing.

The award of the contract was scrutinised at the Competition Board and then approved at the meeting of Cabinet on 26th July 2016 as part of the Contracts Forward Plan.

The contract was awarded to Grant Thornton as the lead organisation, with a number of other organisations working with them, including for example the Centre for Public Scrutiny and CIPFA.

The recent IMD does not extend the contract either in its scope or duration but it extends the contract value (budget). This action is allowed for in the contract that was initially tendered and let.

The extension of the contract under this IMD will not require any additional savings as the costs will be met from the existing transformation reserve that was approved by Full Council in February 2017.

It should also be noted that the contract has been let on the basis of 1year+1year+1year, rather than a straight 3 year contract award. This was done to ensure that the Council maintains maximum flexibility in its arrangements and is not contractually obliged to continue with the contract if it is not performing satisfactorily or if the council's requirements change over time and the contract is no longer required.

I am however grateful for the attention drawn to this decision, and I am reviewing it and will make further information available to Councillors in order that its operation and scope, and anxieties that it may be perceived to be escalating, are addressed.

8.13 Question from Councillor Helal Uddin

What progress is being made to improve the quality of the Council's housing stock?

Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam

The Council is committed to improving the borough's housing stock and reverse the disrepair and neglect we inherited from the previous administration.

Cabinet adopted £22m and £18m in 2016/17 and 2017/18 respectively for capital works. 39 blocks across neighbourhoods have been identified for improvement works comprising, but not limited to roofs, windows, brickworks, lifts and door entry systems.

In addition, procurement of the Better Neighbourhood Framework has commenced, the same is targeted to complete in September 2018. The Framework will deliver the Council's five year capital programme, already adopted by cabinet.

8.14 Question from Councillor Mahbub Alam

Will the Mayor update about the changes in his Cabinet which took place this year after the resignation of his both female Deputy Mayors who were also Cabinet members, will he tell us who are the 2 Deputy Mayors now?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

I refer you to my Executive Scheme of Delegation, item 11.2 on the Council agenda.

8.15 Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed:

Can the cabinet member provide an update on the work of the Somali Task Force?

Response from Councillor Amina Ali

The Somali Task Force review led to the development of 23 recommendations, covering actions to improve access to services, a focus on improving employment outcomes and developing local community leadership.

An issue that was repeatedly raised by community members involved in the Task Force was the need for improving knowledge of and take up of services that are already available and to ensure that provision can meet the diverse needs of the community.

This led to the development of the Community Hub proposal which would have a focus on provision for the Somali community.

There has been progress on the development of options for the hub at an existing facility, Granby Hall, that requires refurbishment and already has members of the Somali community engaged through the Somali Senior Citizens Club and Bentworth Friendly Club which provides space for the local residents living on the adjacent estate.

There is ongoing engagement with the wider Somali community through review meetings designed to consult and enable participation of the community in how the hub is developed.

The other recommendations include an ESOL outreach programme and a graduate work experience programme that include new programmes to support employment outcomes.

There have also been a number of outreach and engagement activities to encourage more Somali young people to take up apprenticeships as they are currently under-represented in these groups.

The Council has completed the procurement of a Somali History Project to develop a project that will look at the long history of the community in the borough and in the East End. The project will engage local people to create the programme and is part of the work to develop local community leadership.

Other work includes improving Somali representation at key consultative and strategic partnership forums.

8.16 Question from Councillor Peter Golds

'Is the Mayor aware of the legal requirements as regards child fostering placements in the UK as well as the international norms established by the United Nations General Assembly in the 'Convention on the Rights of the Child'?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

Yes, I would in particular note the requirement under Article 20 that when a child is placed in foster care, residential care or for adoption, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

These rights are reflected in relevant UK legislation, however, it is important to note that although the child's background must be promoted, that does not equate to a requirement to place children with carers who exactly match their background. The primary concern when placing a child who cannot live with their own parents is that they will be in a supportive, caring placement where all of their needs will be met, including those set out in Article 20.

To ensure compliance with the Council's legal duties, our foster carers and adopters are comprehensively trained to meet these needs in respect of children from different backgrounds who are placed in their care. The Council also ensures that contact is arranged with the birth family at a level which meets the needs of the child. I refer you also to an earlier answer (8.4) on the agenda.

8.17 Question from Councillor Clare Harrisson

Can the Mayor provide a brief update on recruitment to senior officer positions?

Response from Councillor David Edgar

We've made significant progress in appointing excellent officers to our senior leadership team.

The posts of Corporate Director Governance and the 5 Divisional Directors of Community Safety, IT, HR and Transformation, Legal and Growth and Economic Development have now been appointed.

Final interviews for the posts of Divisional Directors for Youth and Children's Commissioning and Sports, Leisure and Culture, are taking place in October. Also the posts of Joint Director Integrated Commissioning and Divisional Director Adults Social Care have now closed and shortlisting and interviews are being organised for October and November.

The Corporate Director Place is being covered by the existing Divisional Director for Property and Major Programmes and the Divisional Director for Housing and Regeneration is being covered on an interim basis. It is expected that recruitment to these roles will commence in 2018.

8.18 Question from Councillor Shah Alam

Will the Mayor keep the current operating parking times of 8.30am till 5.30pm Monday and Friday?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

I am clear that I will not support extending the parking permit hours unless there is a clear need, and following a thorough consultation.

The Council followed up on feedback from residents about parking difficulties outside of the controlled parking zone operating times and sent a survey to some residents in the B2 and B4 parking zones. This matter was also addressed in my response to a petition earlier in the meeting.

8.19 Question from Councillor Candida Ronald

What action is the Mayor taking to prevent noise pollution from events on the Greenwich Peninsula having an adverse impact on residents on the riverside in Blackwall and Cubitt Town?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

The Council will monitor any noise issues, and if appropriate will engage with Greenwich, and identify how these can be reduced, and what actions can be taken to prevent further problems.

The Council has an out of hours call out, and conversations are taking place with Greenwich, and we will make representation where applicable. The service also actively engages with ward Members, but to date they have not established a statutory nuisance to take forward. This work will continue.

I am also planning to meet with the Leader of Greenwich Council and will keep you updated on this issue. Clearly, as the Greenwich Peninsular develops we will need to work with local residents on the Isle of Dogs and at Blackwall who will be affected by activity there, although the powers clearly reside with the Royal Borough of Greenwich. This needs to be a developing relationship with our neighbour.

8.20 Question from Councillor Maium Miah

Will the Mayor meet my ward residents of Kedge House, Winch House and Starboard Way, with me, who have been badly affected by the Westferry Printworks construction?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

I know that Environmental Health Officers have met the local ward Councillor and residents on a number of occasions to investigate noise, dust and vibration issues.

I understand remedial works were undertaken to reduce the disturbance to residents, however I am happy to meet with residents to discuss any additional concerns. Please contact my office if you would like to progress this.

8.21 Question from Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed

What support does the Council offer to local businesses to help them grow?

Response from Councillor Joshua Peck

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets currently offers support to its business base through various projects managed by its Enterprise team.

The support currently includes:

Start Up Ready (Training):

Training and practical help aimed at new entrepreneurs who are seeking to start up a new business in the borough.

The Council's Enterprise Team has developed a training initiative for local residents who wish to set up an enterprise or have an interest in becoming entrepreneurs. Delivered in partnership with local support agency London Small Business Centre (part of the Nwes group), Tower Hamlets residents can develop the practical skills required to become an entrepreneur including:

- creating a business plan
- bookkeeping and accounting
- choosing a business model
- learning effective marketing techniques
- Understanding intellectual property.
- 1-2-1 business support is also available for start-ups.

Individuals who complete the start-up programme will have the opportunity to receive advice on accessing business funding from a range of sources including the Start Up Ready Grant.

Start Up Ready (Grants):

Entrepreneurs who complete the Start Up Ready course will have the opportunity to apply for grant funding of up to £5000 to support the launch of their new business. Individuals who express an interest in applying for the grant will be required to complete an application form and pitch to an independent panel of judges.

Retail Marketing Ready

Supporting retailers in marketing skills – specialist retail consultancy advice.

The Council's Enterprise Team seeks to assist local retailers by helping them to develop practical skills to promote themselves and their businesses through more effective marketing.

Retailers can sign up for specialist retail consultancy support to enhance marketing capabilities including:

- advice analysing consumer market opportunities and trends
- developing niche markets
- creating effective visual merchandising displays

- establishing an online presence whilst developing a social media marketing strategy

The Retail Place

Retailers that take part in our Retail Marketing Ready scheme will also have the opportunity of promoting themselves and their goods through our new online retail destination The Retail Place. Providing shoppers with details of Tower Hamlets' unique and unusual businesses The Retail Place is a free listing for local businesses to help develop their online presence whilst also publicising offers, promotions, news, events and job opportunities. The Retail Place aims to offer the most comprehensive source of information for shopping in Tower Hamlets.

Supply Ready

Supporting local businesses to sell through contracts with large organisations.

The council's Enterprise Team is committed to helping local businesses access opportunities to increase turnover through supplying large organisations.

A business which supplies goods or services to large organisations needs to be adept at selling by means of formal procurement procedures. This way of selling is not for every business. Some businesses, however, do most of their selling in this way.

The Supply Ready programme helps business owners who wish to develop a capacity to supply through procurement processes and works with them in training and individual support to the stage that they are able to win contracts.

Delivered through workshops, masterclasses and bespoke 1-2-1 sessions, this initiative will support businesses in tendering methods, building relationships, pitching to buyers and developing growth strategies.

Good premises for business

Helping start-up and small businesses find suitable workspaces.

A big factor which inhibits local enterprise development is the availability of suitable workspace and business premises.

By working closely with local workspace providers the council's Enterprise Team seeks to offer advice to small and start-up businesses on suitable workspace on flexible terms in the borough.

Growth Businesses

Assistance is provided to local businesses who are currently undergoing a period of growth.

The Growth businesses project which is being delivered in partnership with business specialist YTKO provides support by way of a diagnostic and action planning service for each organisation who identifies themselves as a growing business.

Whitechapel Enterprise

We've opened the new Whitechapel Enterprise Centre which is a Hub is designed to serve and meet the needs of residents and the local business community.

The Whitechapel Enterprise is offering free expert business advice, start-up grants and top-quality affordable shared workspace to local people wanting to start a business.

8.22 Question from Councillor Julia Dockerill

Can the Council update residents on progress on the planned development of the new secondary school on the News International/London Dock site in Wapping?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs

There have been concerns that the current data available to inform Pupil Place Planning is not providing a sophisticated enough analysis of complex demographic changes and this has resulted in excess capacity of school places in the borough.

This phenomenon is acutely felt in primary schools in the west of the borough, whilst there is some evidence of growing pressure for places in the south east of the borough.

Secondary headteachers have also raised concerns about the impact of primary rolls not increasing as rapidly as had been expected on their own numbers in future years.

The Council had identified the possible development of two six form entry secondary schools both due to open circa 2020, one on the Westferry site and one on the London Dock site.

There has been consideration of existing empty places in secondary schools; the expected location of the projected demand for secondary places and the comparative costs of the two secondary school options is currently available.

We have also been concerned at the proposal for the 'Livingstone Academy' which would create an unplanned, and we think unneeded, six-form entry secondary school near to the London Dock site. The opening of this school might render unviable the construction of a further secondary school at London Dock.

Officers have recommended that the council proceeds with the development of the Westferry site to open in 2021 and to review the development of the London Dock site on an annual basis. It is anticipated that demand for secondary places can be managed through the use of existing capacity for the time-being. This is subject to the agreement of Cabinet.

8.23 Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed:

Will the Mayor launch a campaign to recruit Foster Carers in the borough so foster placements can be sensitive to a child's ethnicity, culture and religion?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs

We're proud of our committed and diverse foster carers. The Council's fostering service actively recruits foster carers from across all communities. There is an ongoing campaign and the fostering team are assessing foster carers throughout the year.

Fostering fortnight took place between the 8th May to 21st May and is the UK's biggest foster care awareness raising campaign, delivered by leading fostering charity, The Fostering Network. Established for almost 20 years, the campaign showcases the commitment, passion and dedication of foster carers.

LBTH fostering service participates in this event each year to raise the profile of foster carers both locally and nationally.

Foster carers are dedicated and work with some of our most vulnerable young people. They need our support and we will continue to actively recruit carers to join the excellent carers we already have.

8.24 Question from Councillor Muhammad Mustaquim

When will the Mayor confirm if he has any plans to change the parking restrictions in any part of the borough this year or the next following the formal consultation conducted by the council about potential changes in various parking zones?

Response from Councillor Amina Ali

The Mayor has made clear that he would not support extending the parking permit hours unless there is a clear need, and following a thorough consultation.

The council followed up on feedback from residents about parking difficulties outside of the controlled parking zone operating times and sent a survey to some residents in the B2 and B4 parking zones.

There is a clear option for residents to support the current arrangements, under question 4 of the survey, as it asked if they are satisfied with the current arrangements.

We are receiving valuable feedback from residents and businesses from the survey. This is an informal survey to gather the views of both residents and businesses, and the responses will be shared with Cabinet to help inform them on how residents feel parking arrangements are working.

The survey means if there are particular roads within a parking zone where residents feel there are issues with parking then we can consider solutions, working with local residents.

If changes were suggested, then they would be subject to a full formal consultation with residents and businesses. However the Mayor has made it clear that he would not support extending the parking permit hours unless there is a clear need.

8.25 Question from Councillor Craig Aston

Large trucks routinely enter Narrow Street in Limehouse by accident blocking sections of road, can the Council update residents on its plan to improve signage on the key entry routes especially around the Rotherhithe tunnel entrance.

Response from Amina Ali

Officers have been instructed to look at this issue and make any appropriate changes. This will probably require us to look with TfL at the signage on their roads too. I am happy to discuss this with you further if that would be helpful.

8.26 Question from Councillor Aminur Khan;

Will the Mayor commit to not privatising, cutting or scrapping:

- nurseries
- the careers services
- the Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation?

Response from

Unlike many Councils, we are protecting funding for all of the borough's libraries, leisure centres, children's centres and Idea Stores as well as for our award winning parks. We will also continue funding for all primary school pupils to receive free school meals and offer a 100% council tax discount for the poorest, and have exempted care leavers from paying council tax.

That is something very few councils in the country have managed to do.

And unlike the previous administration we take very seriously our responsibility to manage the Council's budgets and secure excellent services such as those you list and we will continue to do so.

8.27 Question from Councillor Harun Miah

Following a huge petition by Chris Dunne and thousands of parents, carers and young people at the last council protesting the decision to stop its funding, will the Mayor provide details if any viable and concrete proposal has been put forward and agreed to save Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation as it is one of the most successful sports programmes of its kind in the country?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

Contrary to some assertions Tower Hamlets Council is not cutting the THYSF. It is not a council-funded service but we have provided them with emergency funding when they faced budget challenges. In fact over the past year we have provided around £150,000 to help cover their deficit.

Towards the end of this response you will see that I have been actively working with THYSF to help them to build a viable business plan. I am hopeful but further work and discussions are needed, and I and officers are progressing these.

The problem facing THYSF is that they have always been primarily funded by the schools they provide services to; aside from the small amount of funding the Council gets from Sport England which we gave to THYSF to support their programmes. School budgets cuts mean they struggle to afford to buy services like those provided by THYSF.

As a result the THYSF ended the 2016/17 year with a deficit of around £150k.

The Council has not withdrawn any of its existing funding sources, nor were we proposing to. In fact we have given THYSF more money than ever over the past year to give them time to come up with a new business plan.

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.

There have been a number of developments regarding THYSF since the end of the summer term.

Over the summer Langdon Park School consulted on and has now implemented the proposals to make the staff who deliver THYSF services to schools redundant at the end of autumn term 2017. THYSF staff will continue to carry out their normal duties throughout the period of notice until the end of December 2017.

In July the Mayor offered to support THYSF to step out on their own should they wish to set up as a new social enterprise. The Foundation is now working on developing a solid business plan and if successful, the intention would be to formally transfer the staff over to the social enterprise and the existing SLAs would run through to the end of March 2018 as normal.

The Council would consider commissioning the Foundation to run some of the services they offer, through an open tender process, for the next financial year (2018/19) and schools would be able to sign up for this using the SLA portal.

If however, THYSF is not in a position to produce a workable business plan and to set themselves up independently, then the existing THYSF SLAs with schools would be terminated at the end of December 2017 and refunds would be given to those schools to cover the cost of THYSF services they would have received in the Spring term.

An alternative offer for all schools would then be made available from January 2018 onwards. This alternative offer would be informed by the feedback from the questionnaires that schools completed at the end of last term.

8.28 Question from Councillor Kibria Choudhury

Following consistent complaints about crime and drug dealing, will the Mayor provide an update about what action has the council taken to deal with the serious problem of Nitrous Oxide being used as a drug across the borough including any cases that have been reported in the last two years?

Response from Councillor Asma Begum

In response to the concerns of residents, the Council has recently launched the 'No Laughing Matter' campaign, working with partners including local police and Tower Hamlets Homes to tackle the problems caused by nitrous oxide

The Council's ground-breaking campaign 'No Laughing Matter' includes:

- Educating people about laughing gas or nitrous oxide and the risks to health
- Urging residents to report traders selling it for human consumption
- Working closely with trading standards and the police to close down outlets where we know they are selling Nitrous Oxide to our young people
- Providing residents with ways to report discarded canisters so they can be collected.
- Talking to school children about the dangers of nitrous oxide

In addition, Cabinet has agreed new funding for an extra 19 police officers, on top of the 14 recently announced and the six already in post. This will bring the total number of Council-funded officers up to 39. These officers will have a focus on tackling anti-social behaviour, including nitrous oxide.

I should add however that as regards the use of Nitrous Oxide and the associated littering and poor behaviour, while we can take some steps, in a free society what we need is for young people to act responsibly towards themselves and thoughtfully towards others.

8.29 Question from Councillor Gulam Robbani

Will the Mayor look into the persistent issue of why the written responses sent to Members Questions, asked and responded to at the full council meetings, are taking so long to come back to Members when most of the information and responses had already been prepared leading up to the meeting by officers and the Mayor's office or provided by the Mayor/Cabinet Members at the meeting?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

Unlike the previous Mayor who did not like answering questions, my administration has been robust in engaging in the democratic process.

Written responses are provided by the next Council meeting. If issues are urgent they should be raised with my office, with officers directly, or through the members enquiries system.

8.30 Question from Councillor Suluk Ahmed

Will the Mayor provide the total number of people on the Council's housing waiting lists for each year since 2013 until now, and the number of furthest placements made in that time-period with details? Kindly, just provide facts please not the irrelevant details, which are not being requested and I am happy with written answer.

Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam

Please find the relevant housing demand and lets table below for the period 2013 to 2017. The second part of your question relating to placements is unclear, therefore information is provided in the table below on the furthest let outside of Tower Hamlets for each of the years. Applicants rehoused outside of Tower Hamlets will have chosen these homes through the choice based lettings scheme operated by the Council.

Housing Demand	April 2013	April 2014	April 2015	April 2016	April 2017	As at 12 SEP 2017
Total	24,414	20,425	19,783	19,124	18,616	18,687

Lets (Financial Year)	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18 (Apr-Aug)
Total	2,435	1,907	1,872	2,207	1,601	759
Total OOB Lets	42	24	31	9	3	0
Furthest let	Upminster, Essex, RM14	Romford, Essex, RM7	Rainham, Essex, RM13	Rainham, Essex, RM13	London, E15	0

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