

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL

HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON MONDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2009

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

Members Present:

Councillor Helal Abbas	Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Ohid Ahmed	Councillor Dr. Emma Jones
Councillor Rajib Ahmed	Councillor Azizur Rahman Khan
Councillor Rofique U Ahmed	Councillor Rania Khan
Councillor Anwara Ali	Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Shahed Ali	Councillor Abdul Matin
Councillor M. Shahid Ali	Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Tim Archer	Councillor Fozol Miah
Councillor Abdul Asad	Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Philip Briscoe	Councillor Tim O'Flaherty
Councillor Alibor Choudhury	Councillor Ahmed Adam Omer
Councillor Stephanie Eaton	Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Rupert Eckhardt	Councillor Lutfur Rahman
Councillor Marc Francis	Councillor M. Mamun Rashid
Councillor Peter Golds	Councillor Muhammad Abdullah Salique
Councillor Fazlul Haque	Councillor A A Sardar
Councillor Shafiqul Haque	Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor Carli Harper-Penman	Councillor David Snowdon
Councillor Clair Hawkins	Councillor Bill Turner
Councillor Alexander Heslop	Councillor Dulal Uddin
Councillor Shirley Houghton	Councillor Abdal Ullah
Councillor Sirajul Islam	Councillor Salim Ullah
Councillor Waiseul Islam	Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman

The Mayor, Councillor Muhammad Abdullah Salique, in the Chair

The meeting opened at 7.34 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Lutfa Begum, Ahmed Hussain, Ann Jackson, Mohammed Abdul Munim and Oliur Rahman and for lateness from Councillor Tim O'Flaherty.

RESOLVED

That the apologies for absence and lateness be noted.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors made declarations of interest in items included on the agenda as follows:

Councillor	Item	Type of interest	Reason
Helal Abbas	5.1.1	Personal	Board Member of THCH as a Council representative.
Helal Abbas	5.1.3	Personal	Member of Spitalfields Housing Association.
Helal Abbas	11.1	Personal	Member of Council for Arab British Understanding
Helal Abbas	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Helal Abbas	11.5	Personal	Taxpayer and RSL Leaseholder
Helal Abbas	11.7	Personal	Member of Co-operative party
Helal Abbas	11.8	Personal	Member of THCH and RSL Leaseholder
Helal Abbas	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Ohid Ahmed	5.1.1	Personal	Board member of Tower Hamlets Homes
Ohid Ahmed	11.4 and 11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Ohid Ahmed	11.5	Personal	Leaseholder
Ohid Ahmed	11.8	Personal	Board member of Tower Hamlets Homes and leaseholder
Rajib Ahmed	5.1.1	Personal	Council Tax payer
Rajib Ahmed	11.4 and 11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Rajib Ahmed	11.5	Personal	Leaseholder
Rajib Ahmed	11.8	Personal	Leaseholder
Rofique Ahmed	5.1.1	Personal	Leaseholder on the Ocean Estate, Board member of Ocean Regeneration Trust and Council tax payer
Rofique Ahmed	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Rofique Ahmed	11.5	Personal	Council tax payer and leaseholder

Rofique Ahmed	11.8	Personal	Director of Ocean Regeneration Trust and leaseholder
Rofique Ahmed	11.9	Personal	Director of Ocean Regeneration Trust
Rofique Ahmed	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Mohammed Shahid Ali	5.1.1	Personal	Council tax payer
Mohammed Shahid Ali	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Anwara Ali	5.1.1	Personal	Council and business rate payer in the borough
Anwara Ali	11.4 and 11.12	Personal	Holder of Council-issued parking permit
Anwara Ali	11.5	Personal	Council and business rate payer in the borough
Anwara Ali	11.9	Personal	The Healthy Town initiative is part of my portfolio
Shahed Ali	5.2.1	Personal	Member of Development Committee at that time
Shahed Ali	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council parking permit
Abdul Asad	5.1.1	Personal	Council tax payer
Abdul Asad	11.4 & 11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Abdul Asad	11.5	Personal	Leaseholder
Abdul Asad	11.7	Personal	Member of Co-operative Party
Alibor Choudhury	5.2.3	Personal	Ward Councillor
Alibor Choudhury	6.3	Personal	Member of Tower Hamlets CND
Fazlul Haque	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Fazlul Haque	11.5	Personal	Leaseholder
Fazlul Haque	11.8	Personal	Board member of Tower Hamlets Homes
Fazlul Haque	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Shafiqul Haque	5.1.1	Personal	Council tax payer and Council representative on Board of Tower Hamlets Homes
Shafiqul Haque	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Shafiqul Haque	11.5	Personal	Leaseholder
Shafiqul Haque	11.8	Personal	Leaseholder

Shafiqul Haque	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Carli Harper-Penman	5.1.1	Personal	Council tax payer
Carli Harper-Penman	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Carli Harper-Penman	11.5	Personal	Council tax payer
Carli Harper-Penman	11.6	Personal	I have a mortgaged property in the borough
Carli Harper-Penman	11.7	Personal	Member of the Co-operative party
Clair Hawkins	11.10	Personal	Member of UCU – one of the founder organisations of CALL
Alex Heslop	5.1.1	Personal	Council tax payer and Council representative on Board of Tower Hamlets Homes
Alex Heslop	11.1	Personal	I am a supporter of Labour Friends of Palestine, Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Council for the advancement of Arab British Understanding (CAABU).
Alex Heslop	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Alex Heslop	11.5	Personal	Leaseholder and Council tax payer
Alex Heslop	11.7	Personal	Member of the Co-operative party, Tower Hamlets Community Credit Union and Tower Hamlets Co-operative Development Agency
Alex Heslop	11.8	Personal	Leaseholder
Alex Heslop	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Shirley Houghton	5.2.2	Personal	Member of Barkantine Management Team
Sirajul Islam	5.1.1	Personal	Board member of Tower Hamlets Community Housing and Council tax payer
Sirajul Islam	11.1	Personal	TV licence holder and BSKyB customer
Sirajul Islam	11.5	Personal	Council tax payer

Sirajul Islam	11.8	Personal	Board member of Tower Hamlets Community Housing
Sirajul Islam	11.9	Personal	Member of LGA Regeneration and Transport Board
Sirjaul Islam	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Waiseul Islam	11.5	Personal	Council tax payer
Waiseul Islam	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Waiseul Islam	11.6	Personal	I have a mortgaged property in the borough
Ann Jackson	11.6	Personal	I have a mortgaged property in the borough
Denise Jones	11.8	Personal	Board Member of Tower Hamlets Homes
Denise Jones	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Denise Jones	5.1.1	Personal	Business ratepayer
Denise Jones	11.7	Personal	Member of TGWU union
Azizur R. Khan	11.8	Personal	Leaseholder
Rania Khan	5.2.3	Personal	I live on Devons Estate
Rania Khan	11.1	Personal	Supporter of Palestine Solidarity Campaign and of twinning with Jenin
Shiria Khatun	5.1.1	Personal	Council nominee for Poplar Harca and Council tax payer
Shiria Khatun	11.5	Personal	Council Tax payer
Shiria Khatun	11.8	Personal	Council nominee for Poplar Harca Board
Fozol Miah	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Harun Miah	11.8	Personal	Leaseholder
Lutfur Rahman	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Lutfur Rahman	11.6	Personal	Mortgaged property
Lutfur Rahman	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Muhammad Abdullah Salique	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Muhammad Abdullah Salique	11.6	Personal	Home owner
A. A. Sardar	5.1	Personal	Board member of Poplar Harca
A. A. Sardar	5.2	Personal	Ward member for Devons Estate
A. A. Sardar	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit

A. A. Sardar	11.8	Personal	Leaseholder
A. A. Sardar	11.12	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Rachael Saunders	5.1.1	Personal	Council tax payer
Rachael Saunders	5.2.1	Personal	Ward member for British Estate
Bill Turner	11.7	Personal	Member of the Co-operative Party
Abdal Ullah	5.2.3	Personal	Ward Councillor
Abdal Ullah	11.8	Personal	Leaseholder
Salim Ullah	11.8	Personal	Leaseholder
Motin Uz-Zaman	5.1.3	Personal	Close relative living in Latham House
Motin Uz-Zaman	5.2.1	Personal	Board member of East End Homes
Motin Uz-Zaman	11.4	Personal	Holder of Council issued parking permit
Motin Uz-Zaman	11.8	Personal	Leaseholder

3. MINUTES

Councillor Dr Anwara Ali said that she had declared a personal interest in agenda item 7.8 and asked that the minutes be amended.

RESOLVED

That subject to an amendment to record Councillor Dr. Anwara Ali's declaration of a personal interest in agenda item 7.8, the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 17th December 2008 be confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings and the Mayor be authorised to sign them accordingly.

4. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE MAYOR, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, MEMBERS OF THE CABINET OR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

(i) New Young Mayor and Deputy Mayors

Councillor Lutfur Rahman congratulated the new Young Mayor, Uma Akther on her election and welcomed Ms Akther and two of her Deputy Young Mayors Jamil Trofder and Alex Kuye to the Council meeting.

(ii) Exceptional weather

Councillor Lutfur Rahman congratulated staff who attended work despite the exceptionally adverse recent weather. He noted that the Council's services had responded to the conditions and continued to provide essential services for local residents.

5. TO RECEIVE ANY DEPUTATIONS OR PETITIONS

DEPUTATIONS

5.1.1 Deputation re: the effect of the economic downturn on residents

At the invitation of the Mayor, Ms. Claire Palmer addressed the meeting in support of the deputation. She re-iterated the points made in the printed agenda on the effect of the economic downturn on residents.

Ms. Palmer responded to questions from Members of the Council.

Councillor Joshua Peck, Lead Member for Resources and Performance responded to the matters raised by Ms. Palmer. The Council was required to set a balanced budget which meant balancing what it spent on services with its income, including the income it derives from Council Tax.

The Council was committed to ensuring that services for local people are capable of meeting local needs and also to setting a Council Tax that is affordable. Councillor Peck outlined a number of the Council's initiatives to support local residents across a range of service areas and stated that the authority would continue to work with local partners to ensure an effective and affordable respond to the economic situation.

RESOLVED

That the deputation be referred to the Corporate Director of Resources for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

5.1.2 Deputation re: living standards on the Exmouth Estate

At the invitation of the Mayor, Mr. Dave Coker addressed the meeting in support of the deputation concerning the decline of living standards on the Exmouth Estate since it had been transferred to Swan Housing.

Mr. Coker responded to questions from Members of the Council.

Councillor Marc Francis, Lead Member for Housing and Development responded to the matters raised by Mr. Coker. Councillor Francis stated that he had also visited the Exmouth Estate on four occasions and had noted the door entry systems, lighting that had been vandalised and the poor caretaking. He had met with Senior Officers at Swan Housing and as a result Swan had given a commitment to deal urgently with the caretaking issues and had revised the schedule of works for the door entry systems to be made fully operational.

In relation to the redevelopment of Brayford Square, Swan proposed that the existing shops and community interests would be relocated into new premises along the Commercial Road frontage. Residents across the estate would be

consulted on the redevelopment proposals in the coming months. Regarding compliance with the offer documents, the Council was satisfied that Swan's current proposals did not represent a departure but the position would be kept under review.

RESOLVED

That the deputation be referred to the Corporate Director, Development and Renewal for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

5.1.3 Deputation re: Latham House

On the invitation of the Mayor, Mr Aleyk Miah addressed the meeting in support of the deputation concerning Latham House.

Mr. Miah responded to questions by Members of the Council.

Councillor Marc Francis, Lead Member for Housing and Development responded to the matters raised by Mr. Miah and said that the Council had entered into a 15 year management agreement with Family Mosaic Housing in March 1996 and this included knock throughs to create additional family units. Those living in Latham House had been granted an Assured Shorthold Tenancy, which had only very limited security. The people who moved in originally were principally homeless or in severe housing need. Some of those had become overcrowded. The situation was unsatisfactory and a Project Team had been established to determine options and discuss management issues. Councillor Francis said that he would ensure that residents were kept informed.

RESOLVED

That the deputation be referred to the Corporate Director, Development and Renewal for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

PETITIONS

5.2.1 Petition re: Tesco Express Supermarket on Bow Road

This petition was not heard as no representative of the petitioners was in attendance.

5.2.2 Petition re: Island Homes

At the invitation of the Mayor, Mr Terence Austin and Ms. Jenny Fisher addressed the meeting in support of the petition. They re-iterated the points raised in the written petition and called on the Council to investigate the actions of Island Homes and instigate mediation with a view to reinstating the

constitution of Island Homes as a local, responsive and resident-led association.

Mr. Austin and Ms. Fisher responded to questions from Members of the Council.

Councillor Marc Francis, Lead Member for Housing and Development responded to the matters raised in the petition. He said that Councillors shared the concerns of residents regarding One Housing Group's refusal to reinstate a resident majority board for Island Homes and regarding the fundamental changes made to service delivery. Councillor Francis had written to the Housing Minister to ask her to intervene and copies of the letter had been circulated. He had also met the Chief Executive of the new Tenant Services Authority, Mr Peter Marsh. A further meeting was arranged for the following day and Councillor Francis would continue to push for an early resolution to the issues raised.

RESOLVED

That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Development and Renewal for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

5.2.3 Petition re: anti-social behaviour on the Devons Road Estate

At the invitation of the Mayor, Mr. Tazul Islam addressed the meeting in support of the petition concerning anti-social behaviour on the Devons Road Estate.

Mr. Islam responded to questions from Members of the Council.

Councillor Abdal Ullah, Lead Member for Cleaner, Safer, Greener responded to the matters raised in Mr. Islam's petition. The Council are committed to tackling anti-social behaviour and negotiations had taken place regarding additional police officers and neighbourhood enforcement officers to support and work alongside the safer neighbourhood teams. These new teams would be available from April. In addition, the authority had made significant investments in CCTV and Rainhill Way and Stroudley Walk had been identified as sites for CCTV systems subject to funding.

RESOLVED

That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Communities, Localities and Culture for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**6.1 Question from Mr. Philip Whittington to the Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Joshua Peck**

"I moved to the borough earlier this year and my housemate and I duly tried to establish a direct debit mandate with the Council for the payment of Council Tax. We later received a 'reminder' so I made arrangements to set up payments again. After a period where we heard nothing, we then received a summons to a magistrates' court for non-payment dated 9th July (which we received on 12th). When I came to the Town Hall on 14th July to explain the situation, the Council had my bank account details already (complete with a scanned copy of my signed debit mandate) in the first place but had neglected to set up the payment process. I would like to know:-

- a) How many people across the borough experienced this problem?
- b) How many of those people fitted any of the Council's definitions of 'vulnerable' or 'living in vulnerable circumstances' (whom we would expect to experience severe distress in this situation)?
- c) How many older people received summons to magistrates' courts due to this administrative error?
- d) What measures have been put in place to avoid innocent residents in future being intimidated by government (albeit unintentionally) in this way?"

Response of the Lead Member:

a) I apologise for the level of service that you received but it is not typical. Tower Hamlets' performance in this area is acknowledged nationally as good and instances where direct debit instructions are received but electronically filed without having first been processed are extremely rare to the point where the Service Head responsible personally recalls this case. As far as I am aware, this was the only instance of a complaint of this nature during this financial year. The completed form was received on 25th June just before the summons was issued on 9th July 2008. The summons was immediately cancelled and an apology sent to you.

b) none

c) none

d) The investigation revealed that the administrative error occurred as your form was received in the internal mail, and then incorrectly dealt with as if the work had been processed. A minor change to procedures has ensured no repetition.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr. Whittington:

I have seen correspondence from 2008, arising from a Member's Enquiry, to the effect that up to 60 people were in the same situation. I would assume that a proportion of these would be older or vulnerable people so in my view your responses to b) and c), and your assertion that my case was isolated is complacent. What measures do you have in place to avoid this happening again?

Summary of Lead Member's response:

I have not seen the Member's Enquiry you mention as these are confidential to the Member concerned. However I will be happy to look into this matter with the Service Head and take any action as necessary.

6.2 Question from Ms. Johanna Kaschke to the Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Joshua Peck

This question was not put at the meeting as Ms Kaschke was not present. A written response would be provided.

6.3 Question from Mr. Len Aldis to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lutfur Rahman

"Will the Council agree to affiliate to the international organisation "Mayors for Peace", and have as its representative the Mayor of Tower Hamlets?

Information has been circulated to Councillors giving the aims and principles of this organisation that Tower Hamlets CND considers worthy of support from all peace loving people.

In December Mayors for Peace gained 99 new member cities bringing the total for 2008 to 515 and a grand total of 2,635 member cities in 134 countries.

We are also pleased that following his election as Mayor of London, Boris Johnson agreed to continue his support for Mayors for Peace."

Response of the Leader of the Council:

Thank you for bringing this important matter in front of Full Council.

The issue of nuclear proliferation is one that should be of great concern to us all.

We all know that stocks of nuclear weapons left over from the Cold War are enough to destroy the earth many times over.

And as more and more nations develop nuclear technology it is clear that the threat posed by these weapons is increasing.

I sympathise with your aims and the very noble aspirations of Mayors for Peace to combat not just for a world free of these awful weapons, but also from starvation, poverty, the plight of refugees, human rights abuses and environmental degradation.

I do not have the mandate to say yes to your proposal right here.

I am however for this matter to be brought to the majority group, and if they agree to proceed, to a future meeting of Full Council.

In the meantime I wish you and your organisation every success in your work.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr. Aldis:

I thank the Leader for his response. I take a positive message from his remarks and I hope that in due course Tower Hamlets will become the 52nd supporter of Mayors of Peace in the UK.

Summary of Leader's response:

Members have heard the case made by Mr Aldis and I will be pleased to bring a motion to a future meeting where Councillors will have the opportunity to express their views and vote on the matter.

6.4 Question from Mr. Terry McGrenera to the Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Joshua Peck

“Will any provision be made in the budget to encourage the introduction of the living wage in Tower Hamlets as announced in the Council's Employment Policy?”

Response of the Lead Member:

There is a provision of £260,000 within the budget for the introduction of London Living Wage to directly employed agency staff.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr. McGrenera:

Recent research suggests that many workers nationally are paid less than the minimum wage; and that low pay contributes to child poverty. How can more be done to enforce the minimum wage? In addition, are there any officers of this Council earning more than £100,000 a year, and in relation to one member of staff reported as receiving £240,000, will they receive a bonus?

Summary of Lead Member's response:

I agree with nearly all that you have said and our concerns about the damaging effects of low pay are exactly why we have taken the decisions we have on the London Living Wage. Workers should receive adequate pay whether employed by the Council or through an Agency. In relation to our senior staff pay rates these are in the public domain. The particular member of staff you refer to is no longer with the authority.

At this point (9.08 pm) the Mayor adjourned the meeting to allow some members of the public to leave the gallery.

The meeting resumed at 9.24 pm and the Service Head, Democratic Services informed Members that the revised projected end time for the meeting was now 10.50 p.m.

7. TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor David Snowdon wished to raise a Point of Order under Rule 15.12 as he had not received a written response as agreed by Councillor Joshua Peck to matters raised at the previous Council meeting. Mr. John Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services, informed the meeting that this did not represent a Point of Order in relation to the current meeting. However, Councillor Peck said that an answer should be with Councillor Snowdon the following day.

7.1 Question from Councillor Fazlul Haque to the Lead Member for Employment and Skills, Councillor Alibor Choudhury

Can the Lead Member for Employment and Skills elaborate on the work being done to improve jobs and skills in the community?

Response of the Lead Member:

There are a range of activities available for residents to increase their employment skills, information on these can be found at each of the Community Hubs, at Ideas Stores, Tower Hamlets College or through the Skillsmatch service as well as local Jobcentre plus offices.

The Council is offering the following:

The Skillsmatch service which assists over 600 local residents into employment each year through a range of pre-employment training in areas such as construction, security, finance and administration and health. In addition the Single Point of Access service has been developed through the City Strategy and offers a partnership of activity taking Skillsmatch staff into each LAP area working with Community Hubs, Extended Schools Services, Children's Centres and RSL's.

The Employment Task Group offers representation from key stakeholders and provides additionality to mainstream services of JCP and LSC encouraging more employability activity in schools, with parents and with graduates as well as encouraging those furthest away from the labour market to take part in the range of activity on offer.

For young people there is a published list of activities available through Children's Services for NEET's and other young people keen to improve their skills and receive support into employment. There is also a range of support and advice available through parental and family engagement activity.

The Council will be considering a further range of support through its agreement on the allocation of the Working Neighbourhood Fund. This will offer funding to a range of providers, all seeking to offer additionality as well as signposting to current mainstream services. The total allocation is offered on the basis of helping in excess of 6,000 local residents into employment by 2011. The majority of the allocation is focussed on helping local residents secure sustainable employment through support, information, skills training and job brokerage and there is also an allocation for preventative work, helping young people make a more effective transition from education to employment and raising aspiration and skills for pupils. The allocation also includes funding for entry level ESOL.

The recently agreed Employment strategy identifies the key areas of work agreed by the Council and offers an action plan as well as 5 main objectives. These will be monitored and progress reported through the Prosperous Communities CPDG. Through the LAA process an action plan identifies the need to continue to work with JCP in helping as many residents as possible access sustainable employment. Through this current downturn in the economy the range of activities offered by the Government will be identified and explained in detail in the Employment Task Group newsletter. These include tax credits, help with mortgages, discretionary payments as well as general job brokerage.

Through the 5 borough partnership the Council is working to secure more devolution from the Government in respect of national welfare to work programmes. This will give the Council more influence over the commissioning of national programmes and ensure that they reflect the local needs.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Fazlul Haque:

One of the main problems we face is that young people are still hanging around with little to do. Can you assure me that the Council's strategies will make a real difference and impact, and tell me what actions are planned in Weavers Ward?

Summary of Lead Member's response:

The Community Hub is already in place in LAP 1 delivering services for 14-19 year olds. However I agree that there is more we can do to engage these young people and services will be tailored to reach all sections of our diverse community – including graduates as it is not always recognised that they also sometimes require assistance. I will look at all areas and do as much as I can.

7.2 Question from Councillor Shirley Houghton to the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Sirjaul Islam

Will the Deputy Leader confirm that under the constitution it is a legal requirement for Council Members to be formally trained before taking part in and making decisions on the regulatory licensing and planning committees? Will the Deputy Leader explain the consequences to the Council if members take part and make decisions at regulatory committees who have not undertaken the required training?

Response of the Deputy Leader of the Council:

It is correct to say that the Constitution of the Council does contain two Codes of Conduct one in relation to licensing and one in relation to planning which confirm that Councillors who sit on both committees must undertake training before participating in a meeting. Because of the complexity of Planning Committee the training is more detailed and two sessions of training are required before sitting on the Committee with refresher training every 12 months. For Licensing Committee Members simply have to have attended a training session and this does not need to be taken annually but where a Member has been absent from the Committee for some time generally refresher training is given as a matter of good practice.

It is not possible to explain the consequences to the Council if Members do not take part in training prior to making a decision. This will depend on the facts of each case including the number of Members sitting on the particular decision making committee, the number who voted and whether the vote of a non trained Member would have made any difference. Then there would have to be further evidence regarding whether the Member who was untrained understood the facts and task without the training and was able to make the appropriate decision. Furthermore, if the decision was challenged in court then the court would decide whether the evidence on the facts put the decision at risk and finally whether it would be in the Public Interest to quash the decision.

The Committee Clerks keep a log of the training of Members and every effort is made to ensure that Members have the appropriate training.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Shirley Houghton:

I am confused because when I was put back on the Licensing Committee in December 2008 I was asked to sit and when I informed officers that I had not had training in 2008/09 they acknowledged that annual training should be undertaken before participation but stated that maybe I could sit anyway as I had prior experience. In addition I believe that two members did not receive training until some time into the current year but still served on Licensing Sub-Committees. However, Councillor Eckhardt could not sit on a Development Committee until he had received training. In 2007/08 two other members did not attend licensing training so did not attend any meetings during the year. Does the Lead Member agree they were not undertaking their public duty?

Summary of Deputy Leader's response:

I cannot comment on individual cases now but I will be happy to look into the points you have raised and respond after the meeting. As mentioned the detailed requirements are different for Licensing and Development Committees so the advice to Councillor Eckhardt was correct – a member may not serve on the Development Committee until he or she has undertaken the training.

7.3 Question from Councillor Harun Miah to the Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Joshua Peck

Would the Lead Member agree with me that we are facing a very severe recession and possibly a depression, that in these circumstances it would be madness to raise the Council Tax and council charges and that it would be far better if the Council Tax and charges were reduced, that we cannot afford to cut services or the workforce and that the incomes of the workforce must also not be cut and would he therefore also agree that the budget should be set within these parameters and that the relevant lead member and council officers should begin immediate negotiations with the Government to ensure any funding gap is met out of Government grant?

Response by the Lead Member:

The UK economy is now officially in recession. A depression is normally regarded as a sustained period of recession lasting many years and there is some way to go before the current situation could be described as such.

The Council is legally obliged to set a balanced budget and must be prudent and responsible in the way it uses public money. There is a balance to be struck between the need to maintain and improve services and setting a level of Council Tax that people can afford. It is also essential that the Council's budget plans are sustainable in the

medium to long term, which is why Tower Hamlets maintains a balanced medium term financial plan.

The Cabinet's budget for 2009/10 which will be considered by Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 10th February (tomorrow night) and by Cabinet on 11th (Wednesday) is designed to achieve better services in priority areas, investment in new capital schemes, while setting a sustainable balanced budget and a reasonable and realistic Council Tax. It is the intention for Tower Hamlets level of Council Tax to remain one of the lowest in London for 2009/10.

The Council has no plans to cut front line services to local people or to cut staff salaries. However it is important that we keep our spending under review and make sure that our services operate as efficiently as possible, and the Council does have proposals to deliver a further £11.6m in 2009/10 in budget reductions and efficiency savings.

The Council's finances are affected by the current recession, with less income from planning fees and land charges and reduced returns that originally expected from our investments. Despite this, Tower Hamlets prudent approach to budget setting over recent years has helped us to achieve improvements in services at low cost.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Harun Miah:

Peoples lives will be affected – residents need services and the Council Tax should not be raised. You need to find a balance. The Government has lowered the VAT rate and rich people should be taxed appropriately.

Summary of Lead Member's response:

Yes, legally the budget has to be balanced. Your proposals are unrealistic – cutting income and increasing expenditure in the way you suggest will lead in due course to severe cuts in services. In March all Members will have the opportunity to bring forward and debate proposals for the budget.

7.4 Question from Councillor Stephanie Eaton to the Lead Member for Cleaner, Safer, Greener, Councillor Abdal Ullah

Does the Lead Member agree with me that it is vital for the effectiveness of community policing that our Safer Neighbourhood Teams get to know local residents and have a detailed knowledge of the neighbourhood which they police?

Response of the Lead Member:

Getting to know local residents and the local area is a key component of citizens focused policing and the foundation of this is the Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Tower Hamlets Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) have led the way nationally and been a key contributor to the consistent crime reductions in the Borough over the last 3 years. The Better Tower Hamlets Team model has enabled Safer Neighbourhood Teams not only to be locally based but to be co-located with other front line workers, enabling a coordinated multi-agency response tailored to the needs of the local area. Safer Neighbourhood Teams are key players in their wards, visiting schools and community centres and getting involved with residents' associations and Neighbourhood Watch schemes. They provide leaflets and newsletters to local people, informing them of how the police have responded to local concerns and providing practical advice on how to avoid being a victim of crime. Their areas of work are set as Public Set Priorities, by the community, at local ward panels.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Stephanie Eaton:

Will the Lead Member join me and others in the Chamber in welcoming Sir Paul Stephenson as the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner and making representations to him and to the Borough Commander on the excessive turnover of officers in the SNTs, especially senior officers? Tower Hamlets has a substantially higher turnover and this has a detrimental effect on the SNTs ability to get to know the community and the area.

Summary of Lead Member's response:

I had the pleasure of working with the current Commissioner and I have lodged my appreciation on the appointment of Sir Paul Stephenson. I am happy to join you in championing the SNTs and talking to the MPS both centrally and locally. The turnover is an issue but sometimes can be a positive thing. There are many individuals who join, enjoy the job, and then leave to commence a career in the Police force.

7.5 Question from Councillor Ann Jackson to the Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Clair Hawkins

Question 7.5 was not put as Councillor Ann Jackson was not present at the meeting. A written response would be provided.

7.6 Question from Councillor Tim Archer to the Lead Member for Regeneration, Localisation and Community Partnerships, Councillor Ohid Ahmed

Will the Lead Member for Housing provide an up to date report on the situation regarding Blackwall Reach and Robin Hood Gardens?

Response of the Lead Member:

The regeneration of Blackwall Reach was agreed by Cabinet in Spring 2008. After a high profile debate in the media, the Department for

Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) decided that the main Robin Hood Gardens buildings should NOT be listed. However the 20th Century Society, an architectural preservation group, requested a formal review of this decision, which is now being considered by the Secretary of State.

The redevelopment of the homes in Robin Hood Gardens is key to the present proposals for this area. The Council and its partner, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) keenly await this decision and hope it will come in the next 2-3 months. The council has made submissions to support the original decision not to list.

If the buildings are not listed – assuming there is no further legal challenge - work will progress as planned to design the scheme in more detail, in full consultation with the local community, before seeking planning approval.

An RSL partner will be procured with HCA for the first new-build phase of the scheme (the “St Matthias” site) to develop new affordable homes for rent, and replacement homes for home owners, to enable the first phase of decants from the estate.

In the meantime a letter from the Lead Member for Housing has gone to residents explaining the position. A project shop is open part-time and decant survey work continues, in readiness for decant status to commence once the outcome of the listing issue is known. If the scheme proceeds tenants will have options to:--

- remain in the area, in a new home to be built by an RSL partner;
- remain a council tenant, in an alternative council home outside Blackwall Reach;
- apply for other RSL homes across Tower Hamlets

If however the buildings were to be listed, officers would report back to Cabinet on the severe impact this would have on the current scheme and would have to present options for a limited alternative project.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Tim Archer:

Can the Lead Member give an assurance that irrespective of what happens, the residents of Robin Hood Gardens will not be balloted on a transfer to an RSL but will stay with the Council; that leaseholders will be adequately compensated and that residents will get accommodation in the new development of comparable internal quality and size as they have now?

Summary of Lead Member's response:

Every resident will receive a suitable allocation. The Leader of the Council and myself have come from a meeting where ambitious plans were discussed, under which every resident will have a decent home.

In accordance with Rule 12.10 (expiry of time limit), questions 7.7 – 7.24 were not put. Written responses would be forwarded to the questioners.

8. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES**8.1 Annual Report of the Standards Committee 2007/08**

Mr Barry O'Connor, Independent Chair of the Standards Committee, presented the Committee's annual report, which had been tabled, and responded to questions from Members.

Councillors thanked Mr O'Connor for his presentation and for the valuable work that he and the other Independent Members carried out on the Committee.

Councillor Shirley Houghton sought further information on the recruitment process for Independent Members of the Standards Committee. The Service Head, Democratic Services undertook to forward details to Councillor Houghton.

Councillor Lutfur Rahman **MOVED** and Councillor Councillor Sirajul Islam **SECONDED** and it was

RESOLVED

That the Annual Report of the Standards Committee 2007/08 be received.

9. TO RECEIVE REPORTS AND QUESTIONS ON JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**9.1 Joint Arrangements**

There was no business under this heading to be considered.

9.2 External Organisations

There was no business under this heading to be considered.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no business under this heading to be considered.

11. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**11.1 Motion submitted by Councillor Abjol Miah regarding support for the Palestinians in Gaza**

The motion as printed in the agenda was moved by Councillor Abjol Miah and seconded by Councillor Harun Miah.

A tabled amendment was moved by Councillor Lutfur Rahman and seconded by Councillor Ohid Ahmed. Following debate this amendment was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

The substantive motion as amended was then put to the vote and **agreed** and it was accordingly

RESOLVED**This Council notes:**

That during the recent Israeli offensive against Gaza, more than 1300 Palestinians have been killed.

That over 400 of these are children and over 100 women.

That over 5500 people have been injured sufficiently seriously to be admitted to hospital.

That three Israeli civilians and 13 Israeli soldiers have been killed.

That many civilians on both sides have died since the breakdown of the peace process in 2000. (727 Israeli civilians and 2200 Palestinian civilians from 2000-2007 according to Israeli Human Rights Group B'Tselem as cited by OCHA).

That combined with the long-standing blockade of the Gaza Strip, the current hostilities have precipitated a massive humanitarian crisis.

That Israel ignored a UN call to ceasefire for over a week until its aims had been achieved.

That both sides have concluded separate ceasefires but that the underlying problems remain unresolved.

This Council believes:

That military action resulting in the death of civilians, whether as a result of deliberate targeting or "collateral damage" is incompatible with the values of a liberal democracy.

That Israel has used disproportionate and insufficiently discriminating force in the Gaza Strip.

That Israeli tactics, combined with the long-standing blockade of the Gaza Strip amount to the collective punishment of an entire population, in contravention of the Geneva Convention.

That Israeli aggression is unlikely to achieve its stated aims preventing rocket attacks and has demonstrably led to a rise in anti-Israeli sentiment across the world.

This Council resolves:

To condemn this Israeli incursion into Gaza

To call on the British Government to express that condemnation unequivocally and ask Ministers to:

- Condemn Israel's use of disproportionate and insufficiently discriminating military force
- Call on our government to pressure Israel to halt settlement on Palestinian land
- Call on each side to renounce violence and negotiate a settlement for a secure Israel and an economically and politically viable Palestinian state based on 1967 borders
- Consider sanctions against Israel if it refuses to engage in negotiation, just as the US and others have lent support to the de facto sanctions applied on Gaza and Hamas in the form of the Israeli blockade
- Write to the BBC and Sky TV condemning their refusal to air a DEC appeal for aid on behalf of the people of Gaza
- Halt arms exports.

To condemn rocket attacks by Hamas on civilian targets in Israel.

To condemn anti-Semitic attacks, graffiti and abuse within Tower Hamlets or anywhere else.

To support people in Gaza by exploring possibilities for friendship with organisations in the region who are committed to a just and lasting peace and encouraging local businesses to stock fair trade Palestinian products.

To ask youth workers and the Humanities Education Centre to engage with young people on the human rights issues at the heart of the Middle East conflict.

11.2 Motion submitted by Councillor Tim Archer regarding waste incentives and bin taxes.

Councillor Tim Archer **moved** and Councillor Peter Golds **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda.

Councillor Tim Archer **moved** and Councillor Peter Golds **seconded** under Rule 14.1.10 that the question be now put.

The procedural motion was put to the meeting and was **defeated**.

The Mayor then closed the meeting in accordance with Rule 9 (duration of meeting). Motions 11.2 – 11.12 as listed below were not considered due to lack of time:-

11.2 Motion submitted by Councillor Tim Archer regarding waste incentives and bin taxes**11.3 Motion submitted by Councillor Salim Ullah regarding condemning homophobia and prejudice****11.4 Motion submitted by Councillor Stephanie Eaton regarding eliminating excessive punishment for minor parking offences****11.5 Motion submitted by Councillor Harun Miah regarding freezing charges and taxes and maintaining services****11.6 Motion submitted by Councillor Peter Golds regarding the future of homeowners and the local economy in Tower Hamlets****11.7 Motion submitted by Councillor Alex Heslop regarding support for the co-operative and social enterprise sector****11.8 Motion submitted by Councillor Dulal Uddin regarding boosting Council Housing****11.9 Motion submitted by Councillor Lutfur Rahman regarding the Sustainable Communities Act****11.10 Motion submitted by Councillor Fozol Miah regarding support for Lifelong Learning****11.11 Motion submitted by Councillor Md. Mamun Rashid regarding the plight of Latham House**

**11.12 Motion submitted by Councillor Md. Abdul Munim regarding
'parking tyranny'**

The meeting ended at 10.46 p.m.

Councillor Muhammad Abdullah Salique,
Mayor