

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

COUNCIL MEETING

WEDNESDAY 22nd APRIL 2009

**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY
MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE HEAD,
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

SUMMARY

1. Set out overleaf are the questions submitted by Members of the Council for response by Members of the Executive at the Council meeting on Wednesday 22nd April 2009.
2. Questions are limited to one per Member per meeting, plus one supplementary question unless the Member has indicated that only a written reply is required and in these circumstances a supplementary question is not permitted.
3. Oral responses are time limited to two minutes. Supplementary questions and responses are also time limited to two minutes each.
4. There is a time limit of thirty minutes for consideration of Members' questions with no extension of time allowed and any question not answered within this time will be dealt with by way of a written response. The Mayor will decide the time allocated to each question.
5. Members must confine their contributions to questions and answers and not make statements or attempt to debate.

QUESTIONS

24 questions have been received from Members of the Council as follows:-

7.1 Question from Councillor Shiria Khatun to the Lead Member for Regeneration, Localisation and Community Partnerships, Councillor Ohid Ahmed

Can the Lead Member please tell us how many people took part in the Council's participatory budget process?

7.2 Question from Councillor Tim Archer to the Lead Member for Housing and Development, Councillor Marc Francis

Can the Lead Member provide details of the current performance of Tower Hamlets Homes and the RSLs in plural in the Borough at managing void periods?

7.3 Question from Councillor Abjol Miah to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lutfur Rahman

Would the Leader of the Council confirm that there has been a change of policy and enforcement strategy with regard to businesses operating in Brick Lane and the area adjacent to Brick Lane on the Bethnal Green Road, and would he confirm what these changes involve and would he agree with me that the Brick Lane area is a vibrant and economically vital part of Tower Hamlets and that the attempts to shut businesses earlier than they have been licensed to open, under planning laws, is likely to have a disastrous effect on businesses and may lead to closures and would he agree that the decision to require restaurants, bars and pubs to remove street furniture either completely or unless they pay exorbitant charges is again adversely affecting the atmosphere and business prospects in the area and would he agree that, although residents concerns must be taken into account, residents moving into Brick Lane and its immediate vicinity ought to be made aware that this area has a vibrant late night-life and would he also agree with me that it is a matter of concern that council officers, apparently seeking to clamp down on technical breaches of planning law, etc, have taken what business people in the area regard as an overly aggressive attitude that has caused considerable anger in the business community?

7.4 Question from Councillor Tim O'Flaherty to the Lead Member for Cleaner, Safer, Greener, Councillor Abdal Ullah

Can the Lead Member confirm that Bethnal Green is a safe place to walk, after the incident involving a Councillor in Derbyshire St, because Elected Members have the obligation of representing Ward matters whenever they occur, regardless of the time of day?

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

Could the Lead Member provide us with figures that show how much it would cost to send looked-after children to boarding school rather than having the Council care for them?

7.6 Question from Councillor Rupert Eckhardt to the Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Claire Hawkins

In light of the recent planning meeting to allow a fried chicken outlet to be set up within 500m of 6 schools, a mixture of primary and secondary, can the Lead Member clarify the Council position on healthy eating and show how this is being translated into policies that are being implemented to improve the health of children of the Borough?

7.7 Question from Councillor Fozol Miah to the Lead Member for Cleaner, Safer, Greener, Councillor Abdal Ullah

Would the Lead Member join with me in expressing our condolences to the family of Ian Tomlinson who died at the G20 protests in the City of London on 1st April and would he agree with me that there should be a full criminal investigation into his death and would he also agree that policing tactics on these demonstrations which include the controversial policy of "kettling" should be subject to an urgent review and that "kettling" represents an unwarranted and unjustifiable abrogation of civil liberties by placing in temporary imprisonment lawful protestors and innocent passers-by alike and would he also agree that recent developments in the government's "Preventing Violent Extremism" policy which seem to be targeted on matters of ideology are again a potential attack on our civil liberties and likely to be counter-productive, as senior Muslim police officers have pointed out?

7.8 Question from Councillor Stephanie Eaton to the Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Joshua Peck

Could the Lead Member please comment on the recent internal audit finding of "nil assurance" for the Council's management of its Commercial Properties Portfolio?

7.9 Question from Councillor Oliur Rahman to the Lead Member for Culture, Councillor Rofique Ahmed

Could the Lead Member please outline the details of the free swimming initiative recently agreed by the Council?

7.10 Question from Councillor Dr Emma Jones to the Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Joshua Peck

Concerning the religious sisters who were previously housed at 13 Pierhead. The property is a grade 2 listed building and due to the extent of repairs required the sisters have had to leave. The Council were contacted about this issue 5 years ago, but repairs were not made. The sisters had done a lot of work for charities, including hospitals. As this situation could have been dealt with by the Council several years ago, what are the Council doing to ensure that the sisters can be re-housed as soon as possible and what is being done to ensure that this matter is given the highest attention that it deserves?

7.11 Question from Councillor Dulal Uddin to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lutfur Rahman

Does the Leader of the Council share the widespread disquiet about the remuneration of senior council staff who have remuneration packages of well over £100,000 and that this is a matter of particular concern in Tower Hamlets where such a large minority of families are on a total household income of not more than £15,000 per year and when council staff are being offered a pay deal far below the Consumer Price Index which is the more relevant price index for those on lower incomes and that it is about time that a cap was placed on the total remuneration packages of senior staff in local government and an end put to the attempt to lure senior staff away from other councils by inflating their remuneration packages?

7.12 Question from Councillor Azizur Rahman Khan to the Lead Member for Housing and Development, Councillor Marc Francis

Could I be advised how many squatters are currently living on the Ocean Estate and what arrangements are being made to remove them safely, and what advice and support will be available to them to help them find alternative accommodation? What costs will be incurred by the Council in removing and rehousing these people?

7.13 Question from Councillor Rania Khan to the Lead Member for Regeneration, Localisation and Community Partnerships, Councillor Ohid Ahmed

At its last meeting, the Council passed a resolution that included provision to help Palestinian communities by encouraging the sale of free trade Palestinian goods like olive oil. Can the Lead Member let this chamber know how that is progressing?

7.14 Question from Councillor Peter Golds to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lutfur Rahman

Will the Leader provide the dates and the subjects covered with regards to meetings between him and the current leader (Cllr Chris Roberts) and the immediate past leader of the London Borough of Greenwich?

7.15 Question from Councillor Harun Miah to the Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Clair Hawkins

Has the Lead Member seen the statement from Save the Children about the crisis of child poverty in Britain and is she aware of the decision by Save the Children to distribute aid to families in Britain for the first time alongside UK charity Family Action and is she also aware of the report by Oxfam which says that conditions are about to worsen significantly for the poorest one fifth of the population and does she agree with me that these reports from authoritative bodies are extremely worrying for Tower Hamlets where levels of poverty remain extremely high and the gap between rich and poor is one of the most dramatic in the country and was she aware that a march against youth unemployment with some 600 people on it came through Tower Hamlets on Thursday 2nd April en route to protest at the G20 summit at the Excel building and does she agree that the government needs to be doing much more to mitigate the effects of this terrible recession on the poorest sections of society by raising benefits and cutting taxes on the lowest income families?

7.16 Question from Councillor Abdul Matin to the Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing, Councillor Dr Anwara Ali

How many people from the Black and Minority Ethnic parts of our community hold permanent posts in the top three tiers of the Adults Health and Wellbeing Directorate?

7.17 Question from Councillor Ahmed Omer to the Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Clair Hawkins

We have recently seen that our primary schools are performing better than ever. Could the Lead Member outline any forthcoming investment and improvement programmes that will help improve them even further?

7.18 Question from Councillor Ahmed Hussain to the Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing, Councillor Dr Anwara Ali

Can the Lead Member let us know why the Hawthorne Nursing Home has been closed for the last six months?

7.19 Question from Councillor Mamun Rashid to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lutfur Rahman

Does the Leader of the Council share with me a profound concern that the proportion and the absolute numbers of long-term residents in this borough currently employed on the Olympic site is pitifully low and does he agree with me that much more needs to be done by the Olympic Development Agency and other bodies involved in the Olympics project to ensure that long-term residents of the five host boroughs, and above all Tower Hamlets with its chronically high levels of unemployment and under-employment to long-term residents are provided with the training to raise skills levels in order to compete fairly for these jobs and that a review is needed to ensure that there are no unfair employment practices creating formal and informal barriers against the recruitment of long-term residents of this borough and does he also agree that the policy of imposing contractual gagging orders on contractors on the Olympic site represents a danger to encouraging whistle blowing in the public interest, for example, over health and safety issues and that contractors and employees must be provided with the right to whistle blow if it is in the public interest?

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

In the past year we have seen a considerable expansion of the Employment and Skills portfolio. Could the Lead Member please outline some of the key challenges for the coming year and the ways in which he plans to deal with them?

7.21 Question from Councillor David Snowdon to the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Sirajul Islam

Could the Deputy Leader please comment on what steps are taken to ensure that consultation exercises undertaken by LBTH are representative of local residents?

7.22 Question from Councillor Abdul Munim to the Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Clair Hawkins

Would the Lead Member agree with me that, although the Council is to be congratulated for being slightly above average in placing children in secondary school according to preference, having over one quarter of children not achieve their first choice school and having over 150 children fail to secure any of their six preferences is still far too high and would she agree also that it is not acceptable for siblings who wish to go to the same school to be split up as, amongst other things, this can make things extremely difficult for parents, and would she also agree that are children are over-tested for SATS and that there is an excessive use of quantitative assessments by

Ofsted at the expense of qualitative assessments and that the policy of designating schools as “failing” and then closing them is counter-productive in the process of trying to ensure improving educational achievement for our children?

7.23 Question from Councillor Philip Briscoe to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lutfur Rahman

What are the names and positions of Councillors in receipt of committee-specific special responsibility allowances for the municipal year 2008-2009, how much SRA have they received, and how many minutes have they sat in committee meetings during the year to fulfil those responsibilities?

7.24 Question from Councillor Shirley Houghton to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lutfur Rahman

Please confirm the due date for the return of the last quarterly Register of Interests update from all Members and provide a full list of Members of this Council, detailing for each member, the date they last returned their updated Register of Interests form.