

APPENDIX A – WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS THAT WERE NOT PUT AT THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING (21 March 2018)

8.1 Question from Councillor John Pierce

Can the Mayor please provide details on how much the Council has to pay for the previous Mayor and Cllr Rabina Khan's Housing Public Private Investment (PFI) arrangements, how long these housing PFI deals are for and whether ownership of these assets returns to the Council at the end of the process?

Response from Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development & Waste

The Poplar Baths and Dame Collet House development was not actually a PFI, it was a similar technical arrangement called a lease-leaseback agreement.

As part of that agreement the council is committed to pay a defined sum each year to the company which owns the blocks, this year that is £1.3m. These payments increase by 3% each year, 2% RPI and 1% increase, and last for 35 years. That means based on current estimates of inflation the council is likely to have paid £78m by the time we finally own the buildings and that will not be until after 2050.

Borrowing to fund these developments would have been a far cheaper option but it's not clear why the previous Mayor and his Housing Cabinet Member decided not to do it that way.

We should also remember that the rents at Poplar Baths are far higher than our lower social rents at Watts Grove.

8.2 Question from Councillor Oliur Rahman

Will the Mayor provide a comprehensive update about the National Crime Agency investigation (and any police involvement) into the alleged £2m bribery scandal under his watch in relation to securing a possible planning permission for the 5th tallest skyscraper in Tower Hamlets as exposed by The Sunday Times?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

Since I became Mayor I have fought to clean up the borough and tackle the corruption and wrongdoing of the past.

I am clear that I took entirely the right action in relation to Alpha Square.

When I was made aware of these allegations I immediately made the Chief Executive aware of them as is proper procedure.

Following these allegations being raised with me I was sent a short document

which I passed onto the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer.

It is entirely right that I passed them to the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer to take any necessary actions without political interference.

A full and independent external investigation was undertaken by EY including advice from a leading QC. The council and EY then provided the police their fully worked up files over a year and a half ago.

Since then we have chased the National Crime Agency on multiple occasions but to date they have not provided a substantive update on their enquiries. I have also raised the matter with the Secretary of State and asked that it is brought to a resolution as quickly as possible.

I have also asked the same of the current investigation into historic wrongdoing by the previous administration and Tower Hamlets First – Operation Lynemouth.

I think it is in all residents' interests for both of these investigations to be concluded as quickly as possible with those guilty of crimes charged and made to face the consequences of their actions.

Whilst we have taken this matter very seriously we should remember that no planning permission was granted by Tower Hamlets and to our knowledge there is no evidence to suggest that this is anything more than a questionable businessman making big claims to a developer.

8.3 Question from Councillor Rachael Saunders

Will the Cabinet Member update Council on the number of children and families using children's centres this year, compared to last year?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

I'm pleased to report that children's centres are now reaching more children and adults compared to the same time last year, before the restructure.

This is very positive news, especially given the context in which we find ourselves.

The Conservative Government has dramatically slashed funding for early years – funding nationally has been cut by 50% since 2010.

In Tower Hamlets, the previous administration took £3m out of the budget for children's centres and left the service hollowed out, with many centres only existing on paper or running just one session a week.

The previous administration reported that there were 23 children's centres, but in reality 11 of these were not proper centres or even providing services.

We took the decision to refresh our children's centre model in line with recommendations from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Children's Centres

We have 12 children's centre hub sites, as there have been since 2011.

Following the restructure, our children's centres are reaching more children and adults compared to the same time last year.

This is very encouraging, and we will continue to monitor their performance closely.

8.4 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan

Has the Mayor made savings following his devastating decision to charge vulnerable people for homecare?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

We cannot ignore the fact that there is a national crisis in social care funding. Tower Hamlets Council alone has to set aside an extra £9m for adult social care between 2017/18 and 2020/21.

That's an extra £9m on top of a budget which is already over £61m.

This extra pressure comes at a time when central government has dramatically cut funding for local councils. Our council budget has been slashed by £138m between 2010 and 2017 and a further £58m from 2017/18 to 2019/20.

We took the decision to introduce charging for social care reluctantly but because we decided that longer term a proportion of the service could be funded with a carefully designed charging scheme. There was a very detailed design exercise, with consultation, and we are committed to reviewing the scheme's operation quickly to ensure it is not causing hardship. It is in its design one of the most generous schemes in the country – in the top two we believe – but we decided that it was difficult to defend a completely free service when a proportion of users are on relatively good incomes, given the spiralling cost of social care with our budgets, and given that the alternative was to find cuts in staffing and services elsewhere.

It's important to note that people are only asked to contribute to the cost if they can afford it - our local policy includes rules and protections which make it one of the fairest in the country.

There is only one council in the entire country which does not charge for non-residential care.

8.5 Question from Councillor Danny Hassell

Can the lead member please update the Council on the work being done to develop our understanding and response to child sexual exploitation in the borough?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

A significant amount of work has been done over the last 6 months to train our staff and partners to identify where risks exist and deal appropriately with them, including the learning from previous experiences of adults who have survived abuse.

Any child where there are identified vulnerabilities in relation to child sexual exploitation (CSE) now has a CSE risk assessment completed by a social worker which allows us to understand how great the risk is for them.

We then work with partner agencies to put in packages of care and support to reduce the risk to these young people. Alongside this we also work with partners to disrupt the activities of adults who are identified as people who are a risk to our children. The Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MASE) meeting which is a pan London procedure discusses all those children who are at risk of child sexual exploitation and identifies perpetrators and areas of concern and the partnership works together in order that we can disrupt the activity and reduce risk to our children.

In Tower Hamlets we are now establishing an exploitation team which will be made up of police, social care and have links to the community safety partnership and the gangs unit. This will serve and enable us to work together in a co-ordinated way to respond to those children who are vulnerable to CSE.

Monthly reports are presented to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Exploitation Sub-Group in order that the Safeguarding Board has oversight of the risks presented in this area.

Finally all members were invited to a seminar on this subject to keep them informed.

8.6 Question from Conservative Councillor Andrew Wood

Will the Mayor explain why are there no Council owned CCTV cameras in any residential areas of Canary Wharf ward although the entrances to the Canary Wharf estate are covered by CCTV?

Response from Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

CCTV plays an important role in reassuring residents. I am concerned about the misleading statements being put out that there are only 3 CCTV cameras

on the Isle of Dogs. We work with partners who have CCTV in the area such as TfL, Canary Wharf Estate, private and social landlords. All buses, DLR and tube trains and stations have CCTV systems and the Island has a high density of cameras.

The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 means local authorities must have due regard for balancing the need for surveillance and the right to privacy.

Our current camera deployment process requires an assessment which evaluates the level of crime reported to the police and the type of crime committed to establish if CCTV is required. The Council will be conducting a full evaluation of all of the LBTH public space cameras including the cameras Cllr Wood refers to once this financial year has concluded.

The Council's CCTV currently assists with on average three arrests a day, and we are investing a further £2million to upgrade this. We recognise that CCTV plays a role, but with Central Government cuts taking 288 police officers off our streets, I hope Cllr Wood will agree it is only part of the solution.

8.7 Question from Councillor Dave Chesterton:

In support of the 'Time's Up' campaign will the Mayor review the Council's policy on Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs)? The Council has five licensed SEVs, the purpose of these establishments is the sexual objectification of women by men. Sexual objectification is deplorable and plays an important role in gender inequality. The Council has taken a stand on violence against women and girls, isn't it about time the Council also says Time's Up for strip joints, pole dancing and lap dancing in our borough?

Response

The Council fully supports the 'Time's Up' campaign and we have a clear position that we will not support any new sexual entertainment venues in the borough.

Our Sexual Entertainment Venues policy states:

The Council's policy is that there is no locality within Tower Hamlets in which it would be appropriate to license a sex establishment. Accordingly, the appropriate number of sex establishments for each and every locality within Tower Hamlets is zero.

That being said, the policy does recognise that current operators are exempt from this zero limit. Since we introduced the limit the number of SEV premises in Tower Hamlets has reduced from eleven to five. Over time it is likely this will reduce further.

Some areas where SEV premises were previously approved however have changed massively, leading people to question whether they are still

appropriate given the growth of residential development.

The law is quite clear that licences cannot be refused under moral grounds. Essentially the Licensing Committee cannot determine that SEVs are immoral therefore we shall not have any.

That is why the Mayor has asked officers to seek legal advice on how we might be able to amend our SEV policy to allow us to review existing SEV licenses to take account of significant development which might make existing venues inappropriate as neighbourhoods change.

In the meantime officers will be producing further information on the changes to localities over time, when determining licence renewal applications.

8.8 Question from Councillor Ohid Ahmed

Will the Mayor provide an update about the latest situation relating to Raine's House Community Centre in Wapping?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

The Council is developing a network of community hubs across the borough.

The proposed refurbishment and remodelling of Raines House will improve the facilities within the building and protect its historic fabric.

As part of the Council's consultation, we have held two consultation events at Raines House to gather residents' views on the refurbishment of the building to create a community hub and about the proposed charges.

The events were well attended and the majority of those who attended were supportive of the investment in essential repairs and making the building more accessible for the Wapping community.

The intention is to submit a planning application for the refurbishment works, appoint a specialist contractor and start work on site at the end of September 2018. The work is expected to take between 6 to 8 months to complete and will be re-opened in time for the 300 year anniversary celebrations in May 2019.

Until the refurbishment works are carried out, we will not be changing the costs for community groups to use Raines House. When we have completed the works the building desperately needs, community groups that deliver activities that benefit the local community can apply for a discounted room rate. There were serious problems with the repairs and management of the building to which we could not secure satisfactory replies.

I want Raines to be accessible to a wide range of activities that meet the needs of Wapping's community. There is no agenda to squeeze out existing users but the building needs refurbishment and professional management. It

is a jewel and should be used as a community centre for local people. I have asked my officers to review the charges for community use, as I agree that a sum like £30 an hour for a group of local residents to just meet each other would be silly. We are also giving consideration to the issue of retaining a bar.

8.9 Question from Councillor Marc Francis

Will the Lead Member for Environmental Services update me on the proposed consultations with residents in Cadogan Terrace and Fairfield Conservation Area about the extension of Controlled Parking Zone timings?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

Following last Full Council on the 17 January, work has not progressed as much as I would have liked. The relevant Council team has been predisposed with other projects and has not had the resources to carry out either the informal consultation or the occupancy survey. I am happy to report however that we are now in a position to start.

- A parking bay occupancy surveys of the Fairfield Road area will take place over five weekends (morning, lunchtime and evening on both Saturdays and Sundays and evenings on Mondays) starting from 31 March. This will allow us to monitor the area both during the West Ham home games (currently scheduled for 31 March, 16 April and 29 April) and at other times.
- With respect to Cadogan Terrace, from 2 April we will start liaising with the Communications Team to put together an informal consultation with stakeholders with the aim to complete the consultation by mid-May.

I am happy to keep the Bow Ward Councillors updated on progress.

8.10 Question from Councillor Shah Alam

Why has the Mayor chosen to delete the Higher Education Support Bursary?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

The Higher Education Support Bursary scheme awarded a flat rate grant to qualifying students with no measure of impact. This was felt unsatisfactory as no evidence of value for money could be provided.

As a result the Government-appointed independent Commissioners stopped the previous arrangement.

In light of that decision, it was our view that schools are best placed to develop such schemes, and that the Schools' Forum was a useful vehicle for inputting into the scheme at a strategic level. A new scheme, The Mayors Post 16 award was put in place. The scheme targets those most at risk of not continuing in education and training.

The new model to provide all our qualifying schools with a sum of money to promote continuation in education and training post-16 and/or post-18 but within a clear framework of accountability. It is seen as transitional funding, helping schools to support students as they come to terms with the new funding arrangements and allowing non-statutory opportunities that might otherwise have to be reduced.

It also expands the range of those able to benefit from the scheme (when compared to the previous programme) to those intending to move into further education or apprenticeships on leaving school.

The scheme will allow schools to target interventions specifically at our most vulnerable students post-16 with the aim of increasing numbers in education and training post-school

It is further proposed to passport Council grant through Schools Forum to ensure that oversight remains, and that any monies awarded have a genuine impact on outcomes for our students. There is up to £600,000 earmarked in General Funds available to support this programme.

8.11 Question from Councillor Candida Ronald

Could the Mayor/Lead Member update on any progress in securing government funding for retrofitting sprinklers in existing tall buildings?

Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam, Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing

In 2016, a year before the horrific Grenfell disaster, the Mayor commissioned new Fire Risk Assessments for all 900 Tower Hamlets Homes blocks. This found that under the previous Mayor and Lead member for Housing fire safety standards had slipped.

Since then we have acted to improve safety in the blocks we found to be at substantial risk and the Mayor has committed nearly £27m to accelerate fire prevention works.

The Council has not yet made a decision about retrofitting sprinklers to the Council's high rise blocks.

With around 130 blocks of six storeys or higher, the estimated cost of installing sprinklers in all Council high rise blocks would be substantial.

The Mayor has written to the Prime Minister a number of times, and put requests through London Councils and the LGA, seeking confirmation that the Government will fund the installation of sprinkler systems in blocks where it is assessed they would be of significant safety benefit and have resident support.

The Government have refused to support this.

The Government must properly fund fire safety works across the UK, for example including sprinklers, and accept that its disastrous programme of deregulation and cost cutting is dangerous.

We will of course want to see the conclusions of the public inquiry into the Grenfell fire and recommendations made.

8.12 Question from Councillor Peter Golds

There are increasing problems of poor water pressure on the Isle of Dogs. Residents on the Kingsbridge Estate, Mill Quay, Maritime Quay, Lockesfield Place and Betty May Gray House on the south of the Island are all suffering from this problem. Will the Mayor investigate whether the situation is related to the scale of development on the Island causing increasing demand on existing and therefore overcapacity infrastructure?

Response from Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development & Waste

The Council consults Thames Water on the development of all planning policy, including the Local Plan.

We discussed the supporting Infrastructure Delivery Plan with Thames Water and they are aware of the plan for development on the Isle of Dogs and throughout the borough.

We consult Thames Water on all strategic planning applications. This will generally result in the inclusion of a condition on planning permissions for the developer to complete an Impact Study of the existing water supply infrastructure, which is reviewed by Thames Water, before development commences.

The developer and Thames Water are then responsible for implementing measures recommended by the Impact Study to ensure the network capacity is not impaired.

As a result, Thames Water should notify the Council if they expect the scale of development on the Isle of Dogs to cause the water supply infrastructure to be detrimentally impacted.

Council officers are in regular contact with Thames Water and will raise the matter with them to ensure that this is the case.

8.13 Question from Councillor Shiria Khatun

What progress is being made with Operation Continuum, the ongoing partnership between the Council and Police tackling drug crime in the borough?

Response from Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

Operation Continuum is the partnership response to issues of drug dealing in the borough.

Borough Police, the Council and its funded police officers, and Tower Hamlets Homes have been taking action over the last few months. This is a co-ordinated effort to remove as many drug dealers and drugs off our streets as possible.

To date there have been two operations, one in December and the latest in February. It has resulted in:

- 14 properties being raided seizing drugs and £27,000
- A handgun being recovered
- Carried out two weapons sweeps
- 26 Arrests
- 84 ASB Warnings issued
- Given 40 Section 59 Warnings for Anti-social use of vehicles, allowing Police to seize them if found being used this way a second time
- Seized drugs including crack cocaine and
- Seized over £10,000 in cash in one raid alone

More operations are planned.

As well as tackling drug dealing, the Council offers many services to support those experiencing drug and alcohol problems, with around £8m spent on treatment services each year. Investment locally is generating benefits: the estimated number of crimes prevented per year after starting drug treatment in Tower Hamlets is 45,790.

8.14 Question from Councillor Mahbub Alam

Will the Mayor inform how many residents have been hit by his decision to remove our free homecare service in the borough?

Response

We cannot ignore the fact that there is a national crisis in social care funding. Tower Hamlets Council alone has to set aside an extra £9m for adult social care between 2017/18 and 2020/21 – that's an extra £9m on top of a budget which is already over £61m. We have to do this because demand for social care services is increasing and last year alone (2016/17) we received over 3,600 requests for new adult social care support – that's 10% up on the previous year.

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) estimates that nationally, between 2010 and 2015, £4.6bn was cut from the adult social care

budget. Combined with the ever-increasing demand for social care services, these Government cuts are simply unsustainable.

Despite the fact that the Council has to provide social care for more residents, with less funding, the Conservative Government continues to cut budgets. Our council budget has been slashed by £138m between 2010 and 2017 and a further £58m from 2017/18 to 2019/20.

Conservative Government cuts, plus year-on-year increases in the number of residents who rely on social care services, puts great pressure on the resources we have available to us. It means difficult decisions have to be made.

It's important to note that people are only asked to contribute to the cost if they can afford it - our local policy includes rules and protections which make it one of the fairest in the country. Indeed, there is only one council in the entire country which does not charge for non-residential care.

Many councils across London and the UK have introduced charging for social care, and some use the national scheme. We firmly decided against the national scheme, as it would mean around 50% of service users would pay a charge. We agreed a local policy which means that the majority of users still receive free home care and day care. To further support vulnerable and disabled adults, their carers and families, Tower Hamlets Council does not charge carers for services that they access and receive.

For those who do have to contribute, most people only pay a small amount towards it, not the full cost.

Everyone's housing costs (rent, mortgage, service charges, council tax and the value of your main home where you live), earned income, disability-related expenditure, and savings up to £14,250 are also completely protected from charging. (Savings between £14,250 and £23,250 are only included in part – on a taper rate).

There are currently 2,929 people in receipt of community based care. Financial assessments have been completed for 2,145 people. Of these completed assessments, 746 people will face no charge for homecare whatsoever.

The Council also runs a benefits maximisation campaign to ensure everyone can access the financial support they are entitled to for care and living costs. We have also set aside £6.6 million since April 2017 for a Tackling Poverty Fund, including £1 million to provide assistance to those affected by Universal Credit.

As well as individual cases being reviewed as and when there are changes to an individual's package of care, or on receipt of any updated financial information from individuals, an overall impact assessment on the charging policy will be carried out in 2018.

The cuts the Council has faced has meant some very tough decisions, and the decision to charge for social care was one of these tough decisions.

8.15 Question from Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed

Can the Lead Member confirm when regeneration work will start at Stroudley Walk?

Response from Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development & Waste

To facilitate the Estate Regeneration scheme for Poplar HARCA – Bow Bridge Estate, the Council successfully confirmed a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) on 23rd May 2017. The Council is shortly to serve a General Vesting Declaration (GVD) on the residual land interests (mostly shops, plus some rights of way).

This triggers a three month notice period, after which the council can take possession of the land interests and then formally transfer them back to Poplar HARCA in line with previous approvals.

HARCA has confirmed that the construction work start on site at Stroudley Walk is envisaged to be “late 2018”, following the completion of land assembly which is nearing conclusion.

8.16 Question from Councillor Abdul Asad

Will the Mayor reverse the decision to charge disabled people paying £8 per week in council tax following his decision to change the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme?

Response from Councillor David Edgar, Cabinet Member for Resources

The current Local Council Tax Reduction scheme was approved by Full Council in February last year and included continued support of up to 100% discount of resident's council tax liability. This means that those entitled to the maximum reduction will not have to pay any council tax.

Part of the rationale for changing the scheme was the introduction of Universal Credit which is being rolled out across the borough and has far greater consequences for our residents.

Where the changes have had an impact on specific groups such as self-employed residents and residents with disabled non-dependants we have responded by introducing a scheme to provide discretionary relief in cases of financial hardship. Over 300 individuals have been contacted and offered assistance to reduce their council tax bill.

For households where the deductions for some non dependants who receive

disability benefits are higher than was the case under the previous scheme, the council's Benefits Service has contacted all affected households to enable consideration of an additional discretionary reduction in council tax liability under s13A of The Local Government Finance Act 1992.

For disabled non dependant claimants - requests have been sent to 255 households and approximately 103 replies received to date. All those who have replied are likely to have a S13A reduction applied to their council tax. We are continuing to follow up with those who haven't replied and we will also contact new applicants to advise them that they can apply for a reduction too.

The Mayor has also approved £500k per year to help those affected by Universal Credit and the changes to LCTRS to ensure that they receive support that improves their financial circumstances in the longer term

The Council continues to be one of the few in the country that still offers up to 100% reduction in council tax for the lowest income households. During this year 19,115 households have received 100% reduction in their council tax totalling £18.8m and consequently these households do not have to pay any council tax, with over 27,000 households receiving some form of discount. The total discount awarded is likely to be over £24.4 million.

8.17 Question from Councillor Helal Uddin

Can the Mayor or Lead Member please provide an update on the borough-wide Big Clean Up events that have taken place as part of the Clean & Green campaign

Response from Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development & Waste

The council held three Big Clean Up events as part of the Council's 'Love Your Neighbourhood campaign', which aims to work with local people to improve the areas where they live.

We worked with partners including Tower Hamlets Homes, local businesses, social housing providers and Keep Britain Tidy.

Over 130 bags of rubbish were collected, with wall tiles cleared and graffiti removed.

The first week-long clean up event took place between 23 – 27 October 2017. Volunteers took part in litter picking from the area around Whitechapel Idea Store to Cotton Street, E14.

A second Big Clean Up was in December 2017. We asked members of the public to nominate roads and open spaces where they felt that a dedicated clean up could have a positive impact.

Sites across Tower Hamlets were covered, from fly post removal in Brick

Lane to litter picking in Mile End Gardens and the cleaning of an alleyway in Whitechapel.

A third Big Clean Up 3 took place between 5 and 9 March saw nine areas receive some extra love and attention from council staff and volunteers during the week, from Manilla St in E14 to Whitechapel High Street, Roman Road, and Mile End Park.

8.18 Question from Councillor Chris Chapman

The Mayor will be aware that recycling across London is increasing , whilst in Tower Hamlets the figures are decreasing. On the Isle of Dogs, half of all public recycling points were removed last year due to fly tipping. However, fly tipping across the Island and in particular the Samuda and St John's estates has increased whilst nobody has been prosecuted by Tower Hamlets for this practice in over ten years. What does he intend to do to make the Borough and the Isle of Dogs cleaner and greener?

Response from Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development & Waste

The Mayor and I are committed to improving recycling rates in Tower Hamlets.

While some of the public recycling sites were removed due to incidents of fly-tipping across the island we have maintained two sites along Westferry Road in addition to the Re-Use and Recycling Centre at Yabsley Street and a further site at John Smith Mews. This is in addition to our recycling bin collections from properties.

We have also extended the times that recycling sacks available in Idea Stores and libraries to 7 days a week to help make recycling easier for residents.

To help make recycling easier, we are undertaking an inventory of waste and recycling facilities on estates across the borough, which will be followed by a programme of recycling improvements and engagement activities to help residents recycle more.

As part of this programme we will be working in partnership with housing providers across the borough such as Tower Hamlets Homes, Tower Hamlets Community Housing, One Housing, Swan Housing and others to help improve the quality of recycling, reduce contamination levels and recycle more.

This work is supported by our 'Love Your Neighbourhood' campaign which encourages people to work with us to improve the areas where they live.

With regards to fly tipping our enforcement teams issue Fixed Penalty Notices and warning letter to anyone found to be breaking the law in regards to litter and fly tipping. However as part of our cleaner, greener focus we will be delivering a programme of environmental cleanliness improvements, to tackle

problem areas reducing litter, graffiti and fly tipping.

The Mayor's decision to scrap the charge for bulk waste collections has also helped to reduce fly-tipping and has saved residents over £220,000 since 2015.

I have also been working with residents on the Isle of Dogs regarding securing door step recycling in blocks where previously they had used public recycling facilities.

8.19 Question from Councillor Ayas Miah

Can the Mayor explain what changes are planned for Raines House, what is the timetable for any building works and will the pensioners who use the building for social gatherings be able to continue their daytime bingo sessions and social evenings?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

The Council is developing a network of community hubs across the borough. These are versatile spaces designed to allow multiple community groups to use the building at the same time.

The proposed refurbishment and remodelling of Raines House will improve the facilities within the building and protect its historic fabric.

As part of the Council's consultation, we have held two consultation events at Raines House to gather residents' views on the refurbishment of the building to create a community hub. The events were well attended and the majority of those who attended were supportive of the investment in essential repairs and making the building more accessible for the Wapping community.

The intention is to submit a planning application for the refurbishment works, appoint a specialist contractor and start work on site at the end of September 2018. The work is expected to take between 6 to 8 months to complete and will be re-opened in time for the 300 year anniversary celebrations in May 2019.

In the meantime, existing community groups are continuing to use the building at no cost and we have offered Pollyanna temporary accommodation at Chandler Street and will be looking for an alternative venue for the social club activities.

When the refurbishment works have been carried out the building will be available for existing groups, including the Wapping Social Club and the daytime bingo group, to return to and for new groups to book space as required.

The full timetable is as follows:

| Date | Task |
|---------------------------|---|
| August 2017 | Appointment of architects |
| October 2017 | Completion of concept design and feasibility assessment |
| November 2017 | Pre-application advice |
| End January 2018 | First community engagement event to consult on initial concept design and inform design development |
| Early March 2018 | Second community engagement event |
| End March 2018 | Further pre-application advice |
| October 2017 – March 2018 | Completion of surveys and reports required to support planning application |
| April 2018 | Refinement of designs in response to consultation and survey outcomes |
| May 2018 | Submission of planning application |
| June 2018 – Sept 2018 | Prepare detailed working drawings Procure a contractor to undertake refurbishment |
| Early October 2018 | Start on site |
| Spring 2019 | Completion |

8.20 Question from Councillor Maium Miah

Will the Mayor inform how many hard-working self-employed and vulnerable residents have lost their Council Tax Support after his decision to make cuts to the scheme in April 2017?

Response from Councillor David Edgar, Cabinet Member for Resources

The Council continues to be one of the few in the country that still offers up to 100% reduction in council tax for the lowest income households. During this year 19,115 households have received 100% reduction in their council tax totalling £18,816,998 and consequently these households do not have to pay any council tax, with over 27,000 households receiving some form of discount. The total discount awarded is likely to be over £24.4 million.

This is the information in terms of total number supported through LCTRS – overall number down by 3,729, but the proportion getting a 100% discount (i.e. paying no council tax) is up.

| | Total No. of LCTR claims | Total No. in receipt full CTR | % in receipt of full CTR |
|------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 31/03/2017 | 31,089 | 20,929 | 67.1% |
| 01/02/2018 | 27,810 | 19,258 | 69.2% |

Changes in CTRS claims arise as a result of a large number of causes, including rising employment rate, and are not simply a consequence of changes to the CTRS. As an administration, we remain alarmed that the implementation of Universal Credit changes poses a serious threat to many of our poorest families and we are working on ways to mitigate the impact of these changes.

8.21 Question from Councillor Clare Harrison

Drug dealing around Teale and Coate Street has increased rapidly over the last 6 months. This has escalated into fights on the street in the last few months, which is very distressing to residents. What Council projects and initiatives are planned to tackle the drug dealing problem in these areas?

Response from Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

Coate Street, Teale Street and Pritchard Street are known locations for drug-dealing and this issue has been raised at the Anti-Social Behaviour Operations Group meeting.

Previous requests for resources have resulted in increased resources being allocated over the past year for example:

- High visibility patrols on foot in and around the area during the day (SNT)
- High visibility patrols on foot in and around the area during the evening and early hours of the night (THEO/SNT/Neighbourhood Task Force (NTF))
- Plain clothes patrols in the area throughout the day (SNT/NTF)
- Vehicle patrols in the area (NTF)

Whilst these actions resulted in a decrease in reports, an initial analysis of drug-related calls to the police between March 2017 and February 2018, indicates a slight increase of 6.8% within the last 6 months (Sep '17 to Feb '18). We will continue to monitor this and whether additional resources can be reallocated but this will have to be done while balancing other priority areas across the borough.

Residents are encouraged to continue to report community safety issues using the 999/101 police telephone numbers, or in the case of ASB they can use the online reporting methods.

More broadly across the borough Operation Continuum, the coordinated partnership effort to remove as many drug-dealers and drugs from our streets as possible has continued and as part of the first two operations:

- 14 properties were raided, seizing drugs and £27,000
- A handgun was recovered
- Two weapons sweeps were carried out
- 26 arrests were made
- 84 ASB warnings were issued
- 40 Section 59 warnings were given for anti-social use of vehicles, allowing Police to seize vehicles if they are used this way a second time
- Drugs, including crack cocaine, seized
- Over £10,000 in cash seized during one raid alone

Further operations are planned.

As well as tackling drug dealing, the Council offers many services to support those experiencing drug/alcohol problems, with around £8m spent on treatment services each year.

These services are having a major impact with Public Health England estimating that each £1 spent on drug treatment will save £2.50 on costs to society.

8.22 Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed

Does the Mayor believe he is doing enough to address the increase of knife crime in the borough?

Response from Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

We face huge Government cuts meaning fewer police officers on the beat and knife crime nationally going up. We have invested in 39 Council funded police officers, and put extra £1.4 million into tackling anti-social behaviour.

Through our Community Safety Partnership Plan we have prioritised violent crime including the use of knives and corrosive substances in the borough. A dedicated Partnership Action Plan is in place to address knife crime.

We have recognised the success of the Violence Reduction Unit in Scotland where violence is treated as a public health problem. We are adapting our approach based on this learning, involving health, education, social work sectors in developing early help and prevention. For example an intervention project at Royal London Hospital Paediatric A&E is being developed.

We are commissioning a knife crime programme in schools. Community

weapon sweeps are being conducted in partnership with the police, community safety's Rapid Response Team, and the local community. 56 underage knife test purchase operations have been undertaken utilising the council's trading standards service.

Knife crime is a criminal matter so responsibility sits with the police, but as a Council we are using resources where we can to tackle this.

Finally, you can never do enough, of course, and we are receptive to other ideas and proposals to extend our challenge to this menace.

8.23 Question from Councillor Julia Dockerill

The Mayor will be aware of the importance of Raines House as a hub for local elderly residents, will he guarantee that following the proposed refurbishment of Raines House, the facility will remain as financially accessible as it is today for elderly residents with the same or improved facilities?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

Raines House is indeed an important local facility for Wapping residents and I'm very pleased that we're able to refurbish it and improve the facilities that are available as part of our development of a network of community hubs across the borough. These are versatile spaces designed to allow multiple community groups to use the building at the same time.

The proposed refurbishment and remodelling of Raines House will improve the facilities within the building and protect its historic fabric.

The intention is to submit a planning application for the refurbishment works, appoint a specialist contractor and start work on site at the end of September 2018. The work is expected to take between 6 to 8 months to complete and will be re-opened in time for the 300 year anniversary celebrations in May 2019. For information, I have included below the full timetable.

In the meantime, existing community groups are continuing to use the building at no cost. We have offered Pollyanna temporary accommodation at Chandler Street and will be looking for an alternative venue for the social club activities.

When the refurbishment works have been carried out the building will be available for existing groups, including the Wapping Social Club and the daytime bingo group, to return to and for new groups to book space as required.

The Council is also carrying out a review of charges for community groups to ensure that the building is financially accessible.

The full timetable is as follows:

| Date | Task |
|---------------------------|---|
| August 2017 | Appointment of architects |
| October 2017 | Completion of concept design and feasibility assessment |
| November 2017 | Pre-application advice |
| End January 2018 | First community engagement event to consult on initial concept design and inform design development |
| Early March 2018 | Second community engagement event |
| End March 2018 | Further pre-application advice |
| October 2017 – March 2018 | Completion of surveys and reports required to support planning application |
| April 2018 | Refinement of designs in response to consultation and survey outcomes |
| May 2018 | Submission of planning application |
| June 2018 – Sept 2018 | Prepare detailed working drawings Procure a contractor to undertake refurbishment |
| Early October 2018 | Start on site |
| Spring 2019 | Completion |

8.24 Question from Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim

Will the Mayor provide parking income generated by the council for 207/18, 16/17 and 15/16?

Response from Councillor Amina Ali, Cabinet Member for Environment

Income from parking fully funds the parking service, with surpluses being used to fund to concessionary fares and highway and road improvements.

The income from parking charges in the past three years is listed below.

2015/16 (17,792,957)

2016/17 (18,543,677)

2017/18 (15,496,722) (up to period)

8.25 Question from Councillor Abjol Miah

Will the Mayor agree to reverse the decision to privatize council funded nurseries?

Response from Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

Despite your assertion we are not seeking to privatise nurseries.

Currently the three day nurseries provide about 1.5 per cent of the borough's early years provision in term time (105 children out of over 7,000 attending day care), dropping to about 30 children during holidays.

There are almost 22,000 children under 5 in Tower Hamlets, and over 7,000 of them attend a day nursery service. We have a wide range of provision in Tower Hamlets with:

- 68 primary schools, 65 of which have nursery classes and the other 3 have reception classes (attended by 2,980 children)
- 6 maintained nursery schools with teaching staff (407 children)
- 47 day care nurseries and nursery schools provided by private businesses and voluntary or independent organisations including charities (2,503 children)
- 30 playgroups (888 children) and 114 child minders (560 children).

Following the recent consultation on the proposal to seek a new operator for the three day nurseries currently run by the council, we have listened to resident concerns about affordability and have instructed officers to look again at the proposals to see what we can do to improve them.

8.26 Question from Councillor Craig Aston

It has been announced that there is likely to be a further Big Half Marathon in 2019. What steps will the Mayor take to ensure that residents are, unlike this year notified well in advance of both road closures and interruptions to public transport?

Response from Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE, Cabinet Member for Culture and Youth

The Council does appreciate that large events can cause disruption. In advance of this year's Big Half we put information on our website and social media channels in addition to the mail-out the organisers sent out. We also let residents know details of free parking we provided to minimise disruption on the day.

It is estimated that 1,100 Tower Hamlets residents took part alongside more than 40 community groups from our borough. The race is run under the auspices of the London Marathon Charitable Trust Ltd. The LMCT makes

grants to a range of organisations. Since it was established in 1981, a total of £2,820,952 has been awarded to projects in Tower Hamlets.

With events like this, it is principally for the organiser to provide adequate communication to residents to ensure consistency of message. In this case it is clear that communication was insufficient.

We have raised this matter in detail with the event organiser and it will be addressed in the planning of any future events.

8.27 Question from Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury

Will the Mayor confirm the total Community Safety Service budget for each year since 2014/15 until this budget year?

Response from Councillor David Edgar, Cabinet Member for Resources

The Community Safety Service in Tower Hamlets Council is made up of the following service areas/budgets: Management, Partnership, Domestic Violence, Violence Against Women and Girls, Hate Crime, Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT), DAAT Treatment, Rapid Response Team and Business Continuity/Civil protection. A significant proportion of funding comes from the Public Health Grant (which has been reducing year on year through government reductions) as well as other sources including the Home Office and Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). The combined budget for this service area for the periods requested is as follows:

2014/15 total budget was £15.1 million
2015/16 total budget was £13.9 million
2016/17 total budget was £13.5 million
2017/18 total budget was £11.6 million

Excluding Public Health Grant (drugs & alcohol), Home Office & MOPAC funding the figures are:

2014/15 - £4.6 million.
2015/16 - £3.7 million.
2016/17 - £3.5 million.
2017/18 - £3.2 million.

In 2017 the Mayor announced that he was investing over £3m to fund additional police officers in Tower Hamlets for the coming three years. This is in addition to the above figures.

8.28 Question from Councillor Aminur Khan

Does the Mayor believe that the 6 council funded youth centres are sufficient for a growing young population?

Response from Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE, Cabinet Member for Culture and Youth

No I do not. That is why Tower Hamlets has one of the biggest and best funded youth services in London with 37 council funded venues offering almost 400 hours of high quality activities every single week.

Those venues include :

- Eight hubs operating six days a week
- 10 additional commissioned services running five days a week after school and six days a week evening activities.
- Three specialist youth projects
- 16 additional grant funded youth projects

The opposition might like to make wild claims about the youth service but under Mayor John Biggs we have one of the best youth services in London offering hundreds of hours of quality activities every single week.

8.29 Question from Councillor Suluk Ahmed

Will the Mayor update the Chamber about the result of the Council's decision to initiate regulatory proceedings against the Times/Sunday Times in relation to a foster child story?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

Tower Hamlets Council made a complaint to IPSO with regards to The Times article published on 30 August, 2017, under point one of the IPSO code – accuracy.

The council has also made a complaint to IPSO with regards to The Times article published on the 28th August and The Daily Mail article published on the 30 August, under point six of the IPSO code – the use of a photograph of a child in care.

The complaints have progressed for a decision by the IPSO Panel which we are waiting for.

The council also complained to IPSO with regards to The Sun article published on 30 August, 2017, under point one of the IPSO code – Accuracy. This matter was settled by a letter by The Sun accepting the article was not accurate which meant the complaint did not have to go to the IPSO panel.

8.30 Question from Councillor Mufti Miah

Will the Mayor inform us about his meeting and any result in relation to extortionate increase parking charges by Poplar Harca?

Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam, Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing

We will continue to advocate and lobby Poplar Harca to robustly engage their local community whenever they wish to make such changes.

I would remind Cllr Miah, Poplar Harca are an independent organisation and as such, the Council has no formal role in their management, they decide their own parking charges. If however, some of his colleagues attended meetings while they were on the board, we may have had more say.

We made representations at the time of the increase which led to a reduction in the charges from the levels initially proposed.

Poplar HARCA have increased their parking charges for year 2018/19 as set out in the table below:

| | Parking bay |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Tenant/ resident leaseholders and spouses/partners | Increase from £4 to £4.20 |
| Others living with tenant/ resident leaseholder (including VAT) | Increase from £8.40 to £9 |
| Others (including VAT) | Increase from £16.20 to £24 |

8.31 Question from Councillor Harun Miah

Will the Mayor demonstrate how the Social Value Act is being put in practice to secure better social value and benefits for our residents when the Council commissions services or engage with relevant stakeholders?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

The application of Social Value is embedded into Councils procurement procedures and is applied on all contracts over £100,000. As part of the tendering exercise a maximum of 5% of the contract weighting is allocated to secure employment and community benefits for local residents. The range of benefits secured includes employment, educations and skills, supply chain and community resources.

Work is in underway to develop a new Social Value Policy to build on our success and broaden the scope of employment and community benefits to ensure they are aligned with broader council priorities.

8.32 Question from Councillor Gulam Robbani

Will the Mayor provide statistics of the total numbers of crime and ASB committed in Spitalfields and Banglatown Ward for each year since 2014 until now?

Response from Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

Crime across London has increased across the whole of London over the past year. I have no doubt that this is partially as a result of the Government's savage cuts to the police which have resulted in 197 dedicated borough police officers and 98 PCSOs being cut from Tower Hamlets since 2010 and the closure of the police front counter at Brick Lane.

That is why the Mayor is investing over £3m in extra police officers, bringing the total number of officers the council has provided funding for up to 39.

Spitalfields and Banglatown, containing the heart of our night time economy, remains a hotspot for a number of types of crime and for ASB, and resources are targeted there accordingly.

The Metropolitan Police recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour and crime for the Spitalfields and Banglatown Ward as of 12th March 2018 are provided below.

| Spitalfields & Banglatown | 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18* |
|---|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| ASB | 1118 | 1310 | 1643 | 1030 |
| Crime | 2723 | 3073 | 3425 | 2709 |
| * Information for Quarters 1-3 (April 2017 – December 2017) only as the year has not finished | | | | |

8.33 Question from Councillor Andrew Cregan

Will the Council revise its decision to reject the application for Cable Street Studios to become an asset of community value? Cable Street Studios is a heritage building housing a range of arts units that form a unique venue for creative collaboration and cultural exchange, serving as a great asset to the local community in Shadwell and Limehouse, and well beyond. The much celebrated grassroots live music venue at its heart, Jamboree, is clearly on its own enough to secure ACV status. This decision to reject must be revised urgently, and the process for appeal outlined to the applicants.

Response from Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development & Waste

Jamboree located at Cable Street Studios is an important grassroots music venue to our residents, who enjoy the jazz and folk music performed here.

I know that Jamboree is due to celebrate its 10th anniversary shortly and it will be a great shame to lose this popular venue in Tower Hamlets.

We have a strong history in Tower Hamlets of supporting cultural and nurturing cultural venues and I am determined to continue this commitment.

We have provisions in the Local Plan to protect cultural venues.

The Mayor has asked officers to look into options to support Jamboree to stay in their current much loved venue.

The Mayor has written to Sudbury properties asking them to review the decision to issue a notice to quit. He has also written to Jamboree to show his support to them.

Officers rejected the Asset of Community Value application; as you know these decisions are taken independently of the Mayor and councillors. There is no right of appeal but we are talking to Jamboree about all their options including making a fresh application.