

Mayor's Report to Council 23/3/2016

Report of John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets, to Council

This has again been a busy period, including a significant number of public events. Now that the budget is out of the way, a range of other pressing priorities have loomed, including planning and traffic matters, the performance and decisions of a number of our social landlords, the development of thinking about next year's budget savings, further work on our Best Value Plan and the achievement of the challenges set by this and the Commissioners, and many other matters.

On top of this, the recent and unwelcome arrival of the so-called 'Britain First' in our borough has taken up time and unhelpfully distressed and distracted many in our local community. We all have important work to do here and could do without the divisive and menacing actions of others who have no interest in our well-being. I stand in solidarity with those who, and whose values and faith, are attacked. I know the whole Council does too.

I held my second 'Mayor's Assembly' in Bow recently. I also want us to develop a Local Forum model for members but agreeing this appears to take an age, as does the reintroduction of the 'Local Strategic Partnership' although an introductory meeting of this is now planned.

Finally, three particular pieces of news:

- Firstly, only three further editions of East End Life remain. Doris from Millwall will be sad - I trust however that Cllr Chapman will extend my best wishes.
- Second, I have attended my last London Assembly meeting (there are no more). This is a relief - no more '2-jobs' jibes! I was, by the way, almost ejected for heckling the Mayor of London about planning (see below).
- Finally, you will all be delighted to hear that I welcomed my party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, to our borough on Saturday.

Key Events

Britain First: Members should have received a note. This group are here solely to cause division and provoke violence and we must be vigilant, and united, in our opposition to them. I have spoken with and remain in touch with the police and the East London Mosque and others about the intentions of this group and the threat they pose both directly and to public order. We will perhaps discuss this at the Council meeting.

Budget: May I thank Councillors for agreeing to support my budget. This is the first time under a Mayor we have agreed a budget without requiring a second meeting, which is a sign of the new political environment at the Town Hall.

Next year's Budget: However, just in case you thought that was it, we are already discussing next year's challenges. The headline is that we need to save about £30million but I think that with various pressures this will be more like £40million. In the period between now and the Summer I will be discussing with officers and Cabinet colleagues just how we will achieve this feat while protecting services. I have no magical answers – it will be tough, and will need tough decisions. I am happy to discuss with all members your ideas, preferences and priorities.

Senior Staff appointments: We have appointed new Directors of Adults and Children's Services, Denise Radley and Debbie Jones, and a new Service Head for Public Realm, Roy Ormsby. May I thank Luke Addams for serving in the Adult Services role and Simon Baxter for his work at Public Realm. We are progressing with a number of further service head recruitments.

Commissioners: I have recently sent our second 6 month progress report to the Secretary of State, and the Commissioners have in turn written their commentary to me, all of which will be shared with members and published. The good news is that we are making steady progress with addressing the concerns. The bad is that it is not as quick as I would like and there is much work to do to both improve our systems and policies where needed, to progress more speedily and thoroughly but also to make sure the whole organisation is aware of and up for change.

I am concerned that, aside from a few residual parts of management, a sizeable minority of Councillors remain in denial about the misbehaviour of the past. Indeed, newspaper headlines this week are even suggesting that following a statement from the police everyone, after all, is now innocent of any failure. This is ridiculous, and embarrassing. We must learn and move on.

Highways and traffic problems and opportunities: There are several important matters to report:

- Gridlock on the Isle of Dogs recently, with one of the two access roads closed and the other severely restricted, has highlighted just how vulnerable the Island is to such shocks. Not all disruption can be avoided but I have received a briefing from officers and assurances about future management. I am convening a meeting with all local members invited, to discuss these management issues. We need also, from a strategic point of view, need to consider more radical options, such as greater road capacity. I have instructed that this be progressed, both as part of and separately from the Local Plan development.
- A further problem has arisen at Aldgate/Tower Hill and on the new Cycle Superhighway route, with the continued roadworks causing massive disruption. I went to TfL recently, with Will Tuckley and other officers, to discuss these problems. It is alarming that at Aldgate/CS2 TfL admit that when completed the works will significantly increase journey times and reduce bus performance. We do need to discourage Londoners from driving but I remain dissatisfied by this.

- As a knock-on from the Aldgate problems, constituents in Stepney, at Arbour Square, have been massively disrupted by the short-running and turnaround of the 115 bus, which was clogging their streets at all hours. This has now been reduced in scope but remains a nuisance. I will always champion residents affected by such thoughtless acts.
- Finally, a consultation has taken place recently on traffic calming in Cable Street. The response has been very interesting in that it has highlighted hostility to cyclist behaviour on CS3, particularly for parents and children at Blue Gate Fields school, and also in that it has highlighted very mixed views about the problems of rat-running and the inconvenience of road closures on local residents and businesses. It is a genuine consultation, and we will look at the results. However, as with a smaller consultation in Bow it has highlighted that our highways engineers are full of great ideas but sometimes lose the message in the consultation. I want to give greater priority to traffic calming, and the street scene, so this is an area that needs further attention.

Development Issues

Call-Ins by City Hall: I am clear that we need to accept more development, and play our part in meeting London's need for more homes. And for many years we have more than played our part, with massive numbers of new homes. We must, however retain the right to say no, for good policy reasons, and we sometimes do so. In the past month, having previously 'called-in' the Bishopsgate Goods Yard site, the London Mayor has taken over our applications at Westferry Printers, and 50 Marsh Wall – the latter is a 65 storey tower. The reason I was almost ejected from City Hall is that the London Mayor was promising to protect our suburbs from development while apparently happy to carpet Tower Hamlets with 50-70 storey towers. We need to be treated fairly.

Local Planning Forums: I support Local Planning Forums and I will be making a decision at the next Cabinet meeting on the Isle of Dogs and Spitalfields applications, including in particular their proposed boundaries. I am sorry, and more than a little grumpy, that it has taken as long as it has to reach and then return to Cabinet.

Housing: There are a number of challenges with housing providers, many of whom I and Cabinet members have met in the last two months:

- **One Housing Group:** I have attended two meetings on the Isle of Dogs with residents to discuss my and their anxieties about the performance and plans of OHG. I have promised to attend a meeting there with Mick Sweeney, their CEO, so that he can explain himself. I have also committed that I will stand up for residents and will not do any 'deal' with OHG without resident engagement and support.
- **Circle:** The performance of Circle's repairs service appears to have declined again. Residents, and Councillors, are anxious about the proposed mega-merger with Affinity Sutton, which we fear will create an unaccountable giant. The principle of Registered Providers as servants of those in housing need should, in my view, be reclaimed.

- **HARCA:** I think we all know that some of our Registered Providers have been adversely affected by the imposed rent-cuts from Government. In the case of the HARCA the response has been thoughtful but has included a number of decisions which we have challenged. Most immediately this has been the massive increase in car-parking charges. In addition to being in our view excessive and unreasonable, this has served to damage quiet severely, trust between the landlord and tenants. I want us to see how, urgently, we can repair this.

Affordability Commission: My Commission will report very soon, in particular helping us to try better to address the problem of affordability. However, it is likely we will only be mitigating the quite alarming affordability problems we have at the margins.

Youth Service: The review of the Youth Service, under Cabinet Member and Deputy Mayor Rachael Saunders is proceeding. This will in time see a reconfiguration of services and initial work suggest that, even after budget pressures, we can deliver a better overall service. The service has however been historically neglected and has had weaknesses, although many of the staff are excellent and deserve our respect, support and good management.

Mela: Earlier this week I was ready to announce that the Mela, subject to a licence approval, would go ahead on 22nd May at Weavers Fields. However, in the past 48 hours the promoter has requested a delay until July. I am annoyed at this last minute change and will urgently review our plans.

Somali Task Force: A draft report is ready to be shared with the steering group and will then be developed into a programme of possible actions and taken through the executive and opened to scrutiny. It is I think an important piece of work.

Refugees: As last month progress remains microscopic. I remain committed to trying to help, as does the Council.

ASB: I am concerned about the ability of our authority to respond effectively to the range and sheer number of ASB problems we face. I have asked Shiria Khatun, my Deputy Mayor and Cabinet member in this area, to help develop a comprehensive strategy, and I have instructed our Chief Executive to ensure this happens at a management level. In this year's budget we put additional money into this service but I am clear that money is not the only answer – effective partnerships, properly led, are needed to properly address this issue.

HE Awards: A new proposal for HE awards, consisting of grants to schools, is almost ready to be launched.

Cabinet and Mayoral Decisions: Cabinet has met once since my last report and considered a number of matters, with decisions published on the Council's website. In addition, Mayoral Decisions have been signed on:

- Tower Hamlets Homes Board Governance
- Partnership Task Force Programme

- Poplar Riverside Housing Zone
- Policy for determining the suitability of temporary accommodation private sector offers
- Better Care Fund

Engagement and Meetings: As previously reported to Council I seek to record here my main engagements and meetings as Mayor though, obviously, I cannot record every conversation and encounter within this report.

Engagements and Meetings: 16 January 2016 – 16 March 2016

- 18 January 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Khaled Uddin Ahmed
 - Meeting with Service Head, Community Service
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Development & Renewal
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Law, Probity and Governance
 - Housing Affordability Commission
- 19 January 2016
 - Local London – Leaders, Mayors and Chief Executives Strategy Group
 - Education Against Hate Launch
 - Meeting with Tower Hamlets Homes Chief Executive
 - Telephone meeting with David Edmonds, LLDC
 - Appointments Sub Committee Pre-meet
- 20 January 2016
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
 - Council Meeting
- 21 January 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Interviews for Head of Mayor's Office
 - Meeting with Legal & General
 - Meeting with the Collective of Bangladeshi School Governors
 - Mayor's advice surgery
 - Mayoral Assembly
- 22 January 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Communities, Localities & Culture
 - Meeting with Councillor Shiria Khatun
 - Parents Advice Centre Volunteer Graduation Ceremony
 - Meeting with Rushanara Ali MP
 - Mayor's Higher Education Award discussion
 - Meeting with Service Head, Communications
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Law, Probity and Governance
 - Appointments Sub-Committee
- 24 January 2016
 - Holocaust Memorial Day – Interfaith Event
- 25 January 2016
 - Meeting with Service Head, Strategy and Performance

- Home Visit
- Meeting with Corporate Director, Development & Renewal
- Sir John Cass Foundation & Aldgate and Allhallows Foundation
- Budget Meeting
- Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
- 26 January
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Councillor Joshua Peck
 - Meeting to discuss Mela
 - Tower Hamlets Education Partnership
 - Quarterly Best Value Programme Review Board
- 27 January 2016
 - Welfare Reform – Cabinet Roundtable discussion
- 28 January 2016
 - Meeting with Mix Developments Ltd
 - Mayor's Housing Meeting
 - Meeting with Peabody Housing Association
 - Meeting with Barts NHS
 - Meeting with Councillor Andrew Wood
 - Mayor's advice surgery
- 29 January 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Shiria Khatun and Home Office
 - Meeting with Officers regarding Silvertown Tunnel Update
 - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
 - Visit by Marion Richardson School
 - Appointments Sub-Committee
 - Meeting with Councillor Pierce
 - Mosque and Community Engagement Launch Event
- 30 January 2016
 - Visit to Compass Point Residents Association
 - Visit to Saunders Ness Road Site
- 31 January 2016
 - Noakhali Development Association Inauguration Ceremony
- 1 February 2016
 - Meeting with Jim Fitzpatrick MP
 - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
 - Appointments Sub-Committee
- 2 February 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor David Chesterton
 - St Peter's Bethnal Green Project
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - British Bangladeshi Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs
 - Meeting with Queen Mary University
 - Meeting with CEO of London and Partners
 - Cabinet
- 3 February 2016
 - Somali Senior Citizens Club
 - Affordability Commission Findings
 - Meeting with Unite

- Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders and Corporate Director, Resources
 - VCS Strategy Workshop
- 4 February 2016
 - Appointments Sub-Committee
 - Mayor's advice surgery
- 5 February 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
 - Appointments Sub-Committee
 - Video message recorded for Best Bar None
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Children's Services
- 7 February 2016
 - Derai Govt Aided High School 100 years celebration
- 8 February 2016
 - Meeting with Transport for London re. Aldgate Roadworks
 - Meeting with Chisenhale Gallery
 - Meeting with Service Head, Strategy and Performance
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Development and Renewal
 - Budget Meeting
 - Meeting with Officers and Councillor David Edgar re. Civic Centre
 - Cross Party Reference Group
 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 9 February 2016
 - London Councils Leaders Committee
 - London Dockland Memorial Service 20th Anniversary Event
 - Interview with EastLondonLines
 - Meeting with Councillor Ayas Miah
 - Safeguarding Adults Workshop
 - Community Engagement Workshop
- 10 February 2016
 - Meeting with officers and Councillor Rachael Saunders re. Youth Service Review
 - Housing Affordability Commission
- 11 February 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Abjol Miah
 - Meeting with Officers and Councillor Rachel Blake re. Sainsbury's Tower
 - Mandela House Launch
 - Meeting with Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets Community Housing
 - Mayor's advice surgery
- 12 February 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor John Pierce
 - Chinese Language Education Pilot
 - Meeting to discuss Mela
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Law, Probity and Governance
 - Local Media Briefing
- 13 February 2016
 - Chinese New Year Celebration
 - Home visit to constituent

- 15 February 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
 - Salmon Lane Traders Group
- 16 February 2016
 - Telephone meeting with Constituent
 - Meeting with Councillor Joshua Peck
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Best Value Programme Review Board
 - Mayor's Cup Grants Award Reception
 - Governance Review Working Group
- 17 February 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Danny Hassell
 - Whitechapel Delivery 6th Strategic Partnership Board Meeting
 - Meeting with Service Head, Resources, Children's Services
 - Meeting with Service Head, Commissioning and Health
 - All Members Worksop – Local Plan
- 18 February 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
 - Bethnal Green Tube Disaster Memorial
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Children's Services
 - Mayor's advice surgery
 - Strategic Development Committee
- 19 February 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
 - Meeting with Councillor Danny Hassell
 - Meeting with Councillor Shiria Khatun
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with the Yard Theatre
- 21 February 2016
 - Martyrs Day/International Language Day
- 22 February 2016
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Development and Renewal
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Law, Probity and Governance
 - Appointments Sub-Committee
- 23 February 2016
 - Meeting to discuss Mansard Roofs
 - Meeting to discuss Neighbourhood Planning Forum
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Tower Hamlets College Union Reps
 - Meeting with Constituent
 - Meeting with Councillor Saunders
 - GBNews24 3rd Anniversary - International Mother Language Day Programme
- 24 February 2016
 - Meeting with Poplar Harca
 - Fish Island Visit
 - Budget Meeting
 - Council Meeting

- 25 February 2016
 - Telephone meeting with Service Head, Human Resources
 - IOD OAPF Development Capacity
 - Press Conference
 - Telephone meeting with Mayor Jules Pipe
 - Mayor's advice surgery
- 26 February 2016
 - Meeting of Growth Boroughs Leaders and Mayors
 - Meeting with Rockwell Residential
 - Meeting with Trilogy Property
 - Meeting to discuss Car Free Parking Policy
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Communities, Localities and Culture
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
- 29 February 2016
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Development & Renewal
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Resources
 - Housing Affordability Commission
- 1 March 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor David Chesterton
 - Meeting with Commissioners
 - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - London Live Interview
 - Meeting with Councillor Shiria Khatun
- 2 March 2016
 - Meeting with Service Head, Strategy and Performance
 - Meeting with Councillor Helal Uddin
 - Cable Street Vision Pre-meet
 - International Language Day
 - Jack Petchey Achievement Awards
- 3 March 2016
 - Visit to Steward Headlam Primary School
 - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
 - Visit by John Healey MP
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Children's Services
 - Mayor's advice surgery
 - Stand Up To Racism Rally
- 4 March 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
 - Meeting with London Cycling Commissioner, Andrew Gilligan
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Children's Services
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with the Aitch Group
 - Youth Service Review – Stakeholder Consultation
 - Annual Youth Clubs Celebration
- 6 March 2016
 - Memorial Service – 73rd Anniversary of Bethnal Green Tube Disaster
- 7 March 2016

- Meeting with Jim Fitzpatrick MP
 - Meeting with GMB
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Development and Renewal
 - Meeting with Service Head, Commissioning and Health
- 8 March 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
 - Meeting with the Youth Council
- 9 March 2016
 - Home visit to constituent
 - Meeting to discuss Somali Task Force Report
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with to discuss Civic Centre Client Brief
 - Mayoral Assembly at Chisenhale Primary school, Bow
- 10 March 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Ayas Miah and CLC
 - Visit to Bow Boxing Club
 - LLDC Board meeting
 - Mayor's advice surgery
 - Channel S Interview
- 11 March 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor John Pierce
 - Meeting with Londonewcastle
 - Meeting with Rushanara Ali MP
 - Visit to Bethnal Green Academy
 - Meeting with Weekly Potrika
- 12 March 2016
 - British Bangladeshi students Outstanding Achievement Awards Ceremony
 - Reassurance visit to East London Mosque and Altab Ali Park following Britain First incident
- 13 March 2016
 - Further reassurance visit to East London Mosque with senior councillors
- 14 March 2016
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Service Head, Corporate Property and Capital Delivery
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Development and Renewal
 - Meeting with Councillor Sabina Akhtar
- 15 March 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police
 - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
 - Health and Wellbeing Board
 - Public Meeting – Future of Isle of Dogs
- 16 March 2016
 - Meeting with Councillor Denise Jones and constituents
 - Budget Meeting
 - LGC Awards

