

Meeting of the

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 18 September 2019 at 7.00 p.m.

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA

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Agenda Item 3

APPENDIX A – WRITTEN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONS THAT WERE NOT PUT AT THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING (17 July, 2019)

8.7 Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin

With the Co-operative Party's new campaign on food justice highlighting that over 500,000 people used food banks last year, can the cabinet member update members on what measures Tower Hamlets Council is taking to tackle poverty?

Response Cllr Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor for Regeneration and Air Quality

We welcome the Co-operative Party's new food justice campaign and are proud to already be doing a lot to tackle the root problems the Co-op identify.

While the aim of the campaign is to tackle hunger and ensure everyone in the UK is able to make healthy food choices, the Co-Op party rightly identify Universal Credit, the benefits cap and the cost of living as underlying causes.

In Tower Hamlets our Tackling Poverty team has been delivering a wide range of projects to support the residents of Tower Hamlets as part of our Tackling Poverty programme. For example

- The summer can be a costly time for low income families so the council has set up a programme of holiday hunger clubs across 11 schools which will provide free lunches and altogether deliver 21,914 meals through the summer.
- We have a Resident Support Scheme which provides up to £600k a year in crisis grants to residents.
- We also have the Universal Credits Residents Support Outreach Team to help residents in their transition to Universal credit as well as using benefit data to help those who might not be accessing their full benefit entitlement.
- The council commissions a wealth of social advice services from third sectors organisations across the borough to support residents.
- The Council has provided funding to the voluntary sector to test new ideas to tackle poverty around food poverty, digital inclusion, money management and employment.
- The Council supports our Local Food Partnership with third sector partners which aims to create a local food system where everyone in Tower Hamlets enjoys and has access to healthy and sustainable food and supports projects including food growing and community cooking.

These are just a few of the many projects in line to address the serious concern of poverty in the borough. As you will know Tower Hamlets has one of the highest rates of child poverty and pensioner poverty in the country but the council is dedicated to tackling this issues and providing high quality support to our residents.

8.8 Question from Councillor Kevin Brady:

Following reports that primary school classes in my ward had been discouraged from visiting Bethnal Green library, what measures are being taken to ensure our Idea Stores and Libraries are supporting children into becoming life-long readers?

Response Cllr Sabina Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit)

I am assuming the school referenced in Bethnal Green is Mowlem School as I am aware that there was an unfortunate miscommunication which is now being resolved.

I understand that Idea Store officers and the Council have been in discussion with the school in supporting their efforts to increase reading among their children as well as exploring proactive ways to meet their needs as they do not have a school library. As a result a bespoke visit programme is being developed for the autumn term including more parental engagement so pupils can get the best out of the service.

All Idea Stores and libraries actively encourages visits by primary school classes through the new Idea Store for Children offer. This replaces the old programme of school visits which customer feedback and own performance reviews found lacking.

The new programme is proving to be more effective in its support of children in becoming life-long readers.

The offer is based on best practice which includes:

- A daily children's programme (seven days a week)
- The Summer and Winter Reading Challenge
- Family Learning
- One-to-one reading support

We are also working with schools to reinforce the benefits of reading and are engaging parents through tours/visits to show what their Idea Store has to offer them and their children.

8.9 Question from Councillor Shah Ameen

With both a Faith School and a Mosque in Cavell Street, Whitechapel, it is a very busy street. Does the Mayor and Cabinet member agree that the street would benefit from a zebra crossing to ensure residents safety, both old and young?

Response, Mayor John Biggs

Thank you Cllr Ameen. You are right that safety improvements for pedestrians need to be reviewed at this location.

I have therefore instructed officers to carry out a large scale review of both the north and south sections of Cavell Street to address the concerns you have raised.

Although this area has been included within Phase 3 of the Liveable Streets programme, for review in autumn 2021, the development of the above scheme will be brought forward ahead of that work given the safety concerns.

The scheme will look at one-way potential on parts of Cavell Street, a new pedestrian crossing and a potential closure of the north end of the street. We will of course consult with local people to get their views ahead of any changes. I expect an initial feasibility study to be complete by October.

8.10 Question from Councillor Kyrsten Perry

Can the Cabinet Member update members about the good work happening around Liveable Streets, particularly on the work around School Streets and Play Streets?

Response, Mayor John Biggs

Thank you Cllr Perry. Liveable streets will bring transformational change delivering our vision to make our borough one of the best for walking and cycling by improving the local environment and restricting rat runs.

By working with residents and businesses to improve the look and feel of our streets and create vibrant neighbourhoods, that are safer, cleaner and promote walking, cycling and the use of public transport.

At the same time we will seek to significantly reduce non-residential through traffic on local residential streets

Make our neighbourhoods greener, more attractive, safer places with new public spaces, more street planting and less congestion.

By doing so we will increase footfall in areas creating a boost for businesses in our shopping and market areas.

17 areas through the borough have been earmarked as Liveable Streets areas with work to start in the next 4 years.

The 3 areas in Phase 1 have now completed the first stage of pre-engagement where residents' views on issues in their area were sought. These projects are moving into workshops with local residents to look at potential solutions to come forward.

Pre engagement work is now taking place in two of the Phase 2 areas Brick Lane and Barkantine.

8.11 Question from Councillor Marc Francis

Will the Lead Member for Housing set out the number of assessments that have been carried out by the Housing Occupational Therapy Team in each of the past four years, and what the average waiting time for an assessment was in each of those years?

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

Thank you for your question Cllr Francis.

We aim to carry out housing occupational therapy in a timely manner and do our best to ensure no resident is waiting too long.

Given the limited time I have to respond I will write to you with the specific data you requested but already in 2019 we have carried out 178 Housing Needs Assessments compared with 207

for the whole of 2018. I recognise the increase in demand has had an impact on the timeliness of the service however and I am working with officers to try to tackle the struggle of doing more with fewer resources which have resulted from reckless central government cuts.

To help clear the backlog Housing Options is currently in the process of recruiting two locum Occupational Therapists with a view to them being in post by the end of this month.

8.12 Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed

Can the Cabinet Member please update the council on the work being done to strengthen the voice of young people in decision making?

Response, Response, Mayor John Biggs

Our young people are our future and we have a duty to make sure we involve them in our work and make sure our services deliver what they need.

Part of that is by having young people's voice heard in the decisions we make.

Earlier this year we held successful elections for the Young Mayor and have used this to strengthen the role of the young Mayor and their team of Deputy Young Mayors who now have cabinet portfolios.

Our 'senior' cabinet members have met with their relevant young deputy mayors to discuss ideas and listen to their concerns. Cabinet members have been working closely with the young deputy mayors to proactively explore way to implement their ideas into their respective portfolios.

The young mayor is now a member of the Children and Families Partnership Board and other deputy young mayors will be appointed to other partnership boards and council working groups to ensure that there is a strong voice for young people through decision making structures.

We are undertaking work to strengthen voice forums and mechanisms for some of our more vulnerable young people, including the children in care council and the SEND All Ability Youth Forum.

Democratic Services has also hosted two democracy sessions involving the Speaker and approximately 120 pupils from three local schools (St Saviours, St Paul & St Luke's and Arnhem Wharf). The children learned about local democracy, how council meetings work and the fight for universal suffrage; they also took part in their own debates including voting for recommendations for action on air pollution.

8.13 Question from Bex White

Can the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the Social Work Academy and the impact that it is having on recruitment and retention of social workers?

Response Cllr Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People

The Social Work Academy was launched in September 2018 with the primary goal of strengthening social work practice and making Tower Hamlets an attractive employer again. The Academy sought to achieve the goal by focusing on five key priorities.

1. Transform the culture of the organisation by embedding the 'Relational Model of Practice'
2. Invest in 'Grow our own Social Workers' plan by developing a unique three year wraparound service around Newly Qualified Social Workers
3. Provide 'cutting edge' training programs in collaboration with universities and market leaders in training
4. Lead the Quality Assurance Process to ensure effective remedial learning and practice improvement
5. With the above four in place, lead a programme of recruitment that reflects our values of relationship based practice and seeks out excellence

Since then we have achieved a lot. Just some of the highlights are:

- Over 300 staff and senior managers (including the Mayor and CLT) trained in 'Relational Practice'; Ofsted feedback indicates significant cultural shift wherein relationships and dialogue is at the heart of practice
- 35 Newly Qualified Social Workers hired in the first year. The three year program of support is the first of its kind nationally and has attracted much appreciation from Ofsted, national leaders like Sir Alan Wood and universities.
- Based on staff consultation, a new 'Training Program' has been rolled out which is delivered by the best trainers and university partners.
- The Academy has led on key practice development around 'Analytical writing', 'Direct Work with Children', 'Restorative Practice', 'Group Supervision' and more recently on 'Neglect'. Ofsted reported significant practice.

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