

Meeting of the

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 18 November 2020 at 7.00 p.m.

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA

	PAGE NUMBER	WARD(S) AFFECTED
5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS Motion proposed by Councillor Harun Miah on the petition relating to the Covid testing centre at Watney Market.	3 - 4	
6. MAYOR'S REPORT The Council's Constitution provides for the Elected Mayor to give a report at each Ordinary Council Meeting.	5 - 12	
7. ADMINISTRATION MOTION DEBATE Proposed amendment to the Motion from the Conservative Group.	13 - 16	
8. OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE Proposed amendment to the Motion from the Labour Group.	17 - 20	
9 .2 Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2019-20 Amendment to the report.	21 - 22	
10 .1 Governance Model Referendum Proposed alternative recommendations from Councillor Andrew Wood.	23 - 26	All Wards

Agenda Item 5

Tower Hamlets Council Council meeting 18th November 2020

Motion Regarding Covid-19 Test Centre in Watney Market, Shadwell

Proposer: Cllr Harun Miah

Seconder: Cllr Rabina Khan

This Council notes:

1. Tower Hamlets has one of the highest levels of deprivation in the United Kingdom. With Shadwell being one of the most deprived areas in the Borough. With a large BAME community.
2. The Idea Store which was built to provide a place for people who suffer from data poverty to access the internet, provide a study area for individuals who live in overcrowded households has now been given over for SERCO Covid-19 test centre.
3. The test centre is adjacent to sheltered housing for the elderly, in a busy market, densely populated residential area, surrounded by bus stops, and half a dozen schools including the Bishop Challoner Secondary School and Mulberry Secondary Girls School and Sixth Form.
4. There was a visit to the area by Council Officers, Lead Member and Civil Servants from the Cabinet Office, before the announcement of the test centre. No local stakeholders, local councillors or members of the BAME community were invited to that meeting. Nor was there any local consultation.
5. According to the Covid-19 Dashboard incidences in Shadwell are on the rise.

This Council Welcomes:

1. The Mayor and his Lead Member embracing the Blacks Lives Matter movement, by wearing T-Shirts and posts on social media.

The Council Encourages:

1. The Mayor and his lead member to engage with the BAME community and deprived working-class communities in decisions that have an impact on their lives. As the BAME and working-class communities have their own voices and views and are not passive and silent actors.
2. Make the support for the Black Lives Matter movement deeds in actions and not just mere words and take account the views expressed in the petition to remove the Covid-19 test centre from Shadwell, engage positively with the petitioners.

The Council Resolves

To remove the Serco Covid-19 Test Centre from Watney market and remove it to a more suitable location.

Mayor's Report to Council

18th November 2020

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Key Events/Announcements

Although we cannot physically meet, or attend meetings with others, other than by internet, it has been an extremely busy time. While we all desperately need the Covid19 crisis to end, equally we are all now clear that it is a long haul, and not as we had hoped a brief pause to our lives. This means that while working safely is vital it is important that we continue with services and projects as close to normal as possible.

We are making good progress with a lot of our work and projects, and service delivery, while obviously reduced in some areas remains a priority, particularly for 'core services' and vulnerable people.

I am proud of the work council staff and our many partners are doing in the service of local residents.

Covid-19

We are approaching the midway point of the new national restrictions, although the date that restrictions are lifted could change depending on developments.

Whilst of course the recent news of a vaccine is very welcome, we must be very clear that there is still some way to go and we cannot allow our guard to be lowered. I urge everyone to follow the rules and do everything you can to protect yourself and others. Lives are at risk and we all must act now to control the spread of the virus. It's equally important for us all to look after our mental health and wellbeing, and stay in touch with friends, family and neighbours.

Lockdowns have a huge impact on individuals, families, businesses and our communities. It was the right decision that the furlough scheme was extended, but I continue to argue that more support is needed for families and businesses. As a council we will continue to do what we can to support residents, and push for the Government to do more. I welcomed the Prime Minister's U-turn on Free School Meals, meaning they will continue through the Christmas holidays, but like with so many other decisions it was made far too late (leaving local councils, individuals, charities and community groups to step in for the half-term holidays) and in such a chaotic fashion. They must do better.

As I mentioned in my update to residents just after the lockdown was announced, while these are tough times, the East End is even tougher. Our communities showed great resilience, courage and camaraderie during the first peak, and this new lockdown is no different.

As a council, we'll continue to work with our partners across the borough to make sure that our residents, particularly those most vulnerable, are supported. We will get through this together.

Budget consultation

Our budget consultation – which runs until early December – is now available online. Some key information:

- This year the council is spending £1.2 billion gross expenditure (£354.5 million net expenditure budget) on public services to support people and improve lives.
- Over half of our net budget is spent on supporting children and vulnerable adults.
- We've worked hard to make **£200m in savings since 2010**, as our budget has been cut by the Government and we've been squeezed by additional demand.
- The additional pressures that have now been experienced because of the pandemic means that we will now **have to save a further £30m by 2024**.
- Despite challenges from budget cuts, increases in demand from vulnerable residents and a rising population, we are proud to have continued to invest in frontline services and have **the seventh lowest council tax in London**.

Future of the Mayoralty

It's been over ten years since Tower Hamlets voted to adopt the mayoral system in a referendum. A lot has happened during this last decade, and a significant part of my time as Mayor has been spent undoing the damage done by my predecessor.

There's a report on the council agenda on this subject and while there are strong views on different sides of the debate, my view is that it's time for the people of Tower Hamlets to have their say about what they think works best for our borough.

We face huge challenges over the coming years as we continue to respond to the pandemic and as we recover from its impact. We need to be sure that residents are confident we have the best systems in place to respond to these challenges.

Above all else, the debate that follows must be focussed on securing good governance, accountability and ensuring that whatever system we use delivers for Tower Hamlets during these really difficult times.

Ask the Mayor

My next 'Ask the Mayor' event is being held online, on Tuesday 24 November from 7pm to 8pm. The event will focus on the tough financial challenges

ahead for the council and we want to find out what services matter the most to residents. More details on the council's website.

Chinese Embassy

A motion on this subject was on the agenda paper for our last meeting and it is listed again for this meeting. Since our last council meeting I have written to the Chinese Ambassador, and indeed met with a representative, to make sure our concerns have been heard.

A Season of Bangla Drama

I was really glad that we managed to adapt our offer this year so that we can continue A Season of Bangla Drama - now in its eighteenth year – which celebrates British-Bengali theatre.

Our programme of events ends soon, but there are still plenty of online events to come.

John Biggs

Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Individual Mayoral Decisions taken since last meeting

None.

Mayor's engagements and meetings

Below is a summary of the Mayor's main engagements and meetings from 1st October 2020 to 18th November 2020. Please note that most of these meetings were held digitally as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1 October 2020

- Minister Stephen Greenhalgh
- Visit to Locksley A
- Visit to Baroness Road
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- City Hall Covid-19 Leaders call
- Update on BAME Inequalities Commission

1 October 2020

- Cllr Jack Hopkins, London Borough of Lambeth

6 October 2020

- Arbour Square visit
- Corporate Director Asmat Hussain
- Covid 19 Political Leadership Group
- Communication Portfolio meeting

7 October 2020

- Resources Portfolio meeting

- JCAG meeting
- City Fringe Area Board pre-meet
- Whitechapel Bell Foundry
- Mayor's Political Cabinet
- Mayor's Advisory Board

8 October 2020

- Liveable Street Programme
- Faith Conference
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Central London Forward meeting
- Mayor's casework surgery
- Tower Hamlets Hockey Club meeting

9 October 2020

- Cllr Rachel Blake
- Central London Forward

12 October 2020

- Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group Meeting
- Adults, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio meeting
- Columbia Road Visit
- Test and Trace business visit
- Weekly Briefing for Leaders and Chief Executives on Covid 19
- Covid 19 Local Engagement Board

13 October 2020

- Cllr John Pierce
- London Council's Labour Group
- London Council's Leaders Committee AGM
- Culture, Arts and Brexit Portfolio Meeting
- GLL meeting
- Maltings and Brewster

14 October 2020

- Work and Economic Development Portfolio Meeting
- Corporate Induction
- Planning Meeting
- Chanel S interview
- Speaker's signing in ceremony
- Liveable Streets Bow
- Mayor's Advisory Board
- Environment and Public Realm Portfolio Meeting

15 October 2020

- Mount Avil Meeting
- London cladding summit
- Unison Meeting
- Cllr Khan and Cllr Francis
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley

- Planning meeting
- Covid 19 Political Leadership Meeting
- Care Full Pay Campaign: Cllrs Briefing

16 October 2020

- BBC interview
- Cllr Rachel Blake
- Developing the “Anchor” approach in North East London
- OSC Call – in of the Allocations Scheme

19 October 2020

- London Communications Agency
- Corporate Director for Place, Ann Sutcliffe
- THH Chief Executive Susmita Sen
- Aberfeldy Meeting
- Housing Allocation Policy meeting
- Labour Group

20 October 2020

- Growth borough partnership meeting
- East End Community Foundation
- Clarion Housing - Performance on Old Ford Estates
- Safety and Equalities Portfolio Meeting
- Sutton’s Wharf meeting
- Relationship education meeting
- HR meeting
- Mayor’s Advisory Board

21 October 2020

- Mayor’s Traffic Meeting
- Chinese Embassy meeting
- Growth Boroughs meeting
- Arts and culture provision
- Mayor’s Political Cabinet
- GDPR refresher training
- Mayor’s Advisory Board
- Cabinet Meeting

22 October 2020

- Liveable Streets briefing
- Greenwich & Docklands Chabad Jewish Community Center
- Housing Portfolio meeting
- Liveable Streets briefing – Barkentine estate
- Whitechapel High Street development
- Mayor’s casework surgery
- Strategic Forward Planning Meeting
- Covid 19 Political Leadership Meeting
- Liveable Streets - Old Ford West

23 October 2020

- Mayor's Traffic Meeting
- City of London Corporation
- Cllr Rachel Blake
- Rushanara Ali MP
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley

26 October 2020

- Thames Path briefing
- Central London Forward Employment and Skills Board
- Bishopsgate Goodsynd
- Divisional Director of HR Amanda Marcus
- TV One interview
- Liveable Streets briefing
- Weekly catch up for Leaders and Chief Executive on Covid 19

27 October 2020

- East India Dock Basin discussion with Lee Valley
- Poplar HARCA briefing
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Community Safety and Youth Portfolio Meeting
- All members seminar – Ethics and Probity Training

28 October 2020

- East End Trades Guild
- Cllr Eve McQuillan and Cllr Mufeedah Bustin
- City Fringe Area Board
- Len Duvall AM, Leader of the London Assembly Labour Group
- Covid- 19 Political Leadership meeting
- LGC Awards
- Cabinet

29 October 2020

- Greater London Provincial Council Employers meeting
- Greater London Provincial Council Joint Meeting
- Manorfield Primary School visit
- Voluntary Community Sector Portfolio Meeting
- Children and Schools Portfolio Meeting

3 November 2020

- Central London Forward Employment and Skills Board
- Poplar works café visit
- Liveable Streets – Bow
- Aberfeldy Islamic Cultural Association

4 November 2020

- Resources Portfolio Meeting
- Regeneration Portfolio Meeting
- Regeneration Board
- Political Cabinet
- Mayor's Advisory Board

- Online public meeting with Limehouse residents
- Q2 Performance and Budget monitoring meeting – Children’s and Culture

5 November 2020

- Q2 Performance and Budget monitoring meeting – Governance
- Chief Executive, Will Tuckley
- Mayor’s casework surgery
- Q2 Performance and Budget monitoring meeting – Resources
- Assets/Property Portfolio meeting
- Community Group meeting - Leaseholders and fire safety in Tower Hamlets

6 November 2020

- Cllr Rachel Blake
- London Council’s Labour Group
- Tower Hamlets Together briefing

9 November 2020

- Adults, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Meeting
- Ocean Regeneration Trust
- Integrated Care System Leaders meeting
- Corporate Director Asmat Hussain
- Weekly Briefing for Leaders and Chief Executives on Covid-19
- Labour Group meeting

10 November 2020

- Cllr John Pierce
- Cllr Sirajul Islam
- Health and Wellbeing Board Chair and partners meeting
- Cllr Asma Begum
- Petticoat Lane Market Traders
- Planning meeting
- Covid 19 Political Leadership Group
- Covid 19 Local Engagement Board

11 November 2020

- Work and Economic Growth Portfolio Meeting
- Armistice Day
- Environment/Public Realm Portfolio Meeting
- Mayor’s Advisory Board
- Channel S interview
- Youth Council and Young Mayor Black History Month

12 November 2020

- Grants Determination Pre-Meeting
- Q2 Performance and Budget monitoring meeting – Place
- Tower Hamlets Homes
- One Housing Group
- Q2 Performance and Budget monitoring meeting – Health, Adults and Communities
- Audit Committee

- People's Question Time

13 November 2020

- Cllr. Rachel Blake
- Community Food Pantry-Opening

16 November 2020

- Central London Forward: Health & Social Care Senior Sub-Group
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Digital Health
- Rushanara Ali MP
- Cllr. Rachel Blake
- Labour Group

17 November 2020

- Mayor's casework surgery
- Rich Mix
- The Royal Foundation of St Katharine
- Central London Forward Employment and Skills Board briefing
- Budget briefing
- Unmesh Desai AM
- Communications Portfolio Meeting
- Hope Not Hate event

18 November 2020

- Mayor's Traffic Meeting
- Capital Strategy Board
- Planning Meeting
- Mayor's Political Cabinet
- LTDA meeting
- Full Council

Agenda Item 7

7 – Administration Motion for Debate - The Government Have Failed our Children and Young People

Amendment proposer: Cllr Peter Golds

Amendment seconder: Cllr Andrew Wood

Insertions underlined, deletions struck through

This Council notes:

1. That the FOI response FOI: 22996542 Financial support to LBTH during Covid stated that Tower Hamlets Council had received “£62.6m in grants for Council expenditure and reduced income”
2. That the Health and Wellbeing Board was told on the 17th November 2020 that the Council had been informed on the 11th June about an additional £3.2 million grant of money for Local Authority Test and Trace Service Support Grant.
3. That there are reports of an additional £1.203 million in government grants to support children, families and our most vulnerable residents over the winter, as yet unconfirmed.
4. That in the Cabinet meeting on the 28th October we were informed that in the P5 budget monitor that:
 - a. £30.6 million would be received from government in 2019/20 & 2020/21 for COVID relief, this was verbally amended to add an additional £14 millions of extra money recently received for a total of £44.6 million.
 - b. That the total forecast impact of COVID on the Council finances were £35.9 million for 2020/21.
5. That these numbers are very different to those detailed in the Councils 5th August press release titled “Council pleads with government to honour its Covid-19 funding promise” which said then that the total cost of COVID was £60 million and that only £30 million had been committed from government.
6. The uncertainty and confusion that these different numbers have caused which make it impossible to understand the true impact of COVID on this year’s budget.

1. The Government’s exams fiasco which saw a large number of teacher predictions for A-levels and GCSE exam results – particularly in more deprived areas – downgraded by an algorithm until the Government performed a U-turn and permitted teacher assessed grades to be used;
2. The exams fiasco caused a huge amount of unnecessary uncertainty and upset for many young people across the country, as well as jeopardising their futures;
3. The Government’s failure to continue its Free School Meals (FSM) programme throughout the October half-term holiday, despite the pandemic and the jobs crisis causing hardship for many families who were already struggling;
4. That charities, individuals, community groups and local authorities – including Tower Hamlets – had to fill the gap left by the Government’s failure to continue FSM over the holiday;
5. ~~That children and young people have suffered more than most throughout the austerity programme introduced by the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats in 2010, through the rise in child poverty, cuts to youth services, cuts to school funding, failure to properly fund special needs education, cuts to council budgets, welfare reforms, the coalition’s decision to treble tuition fees despite the Lib Dem promise to abolish them, and more;~~

6. That welfare reforms, including the Universal Credit rollout, the 5-week wait, the benefit cap, the two-child limit and the Government's plans to scrap the Universal Credit uplift meaning families will lose over £1,000, have all had a significant impact on children and young people;
7. The Government's failures on Covid-19 testing have left pupils out of school when they do not have symptoms but cannot access a test, worsening the attainment gap;
8. That the Department for Education informed some schools last month that the number of laptops they were promised had been cut by 80% after changes to the allocation process;
9. That the Government has failed to prepare and respond to the challenge of the Covid-19 situation in universities;
10. The Government's threat to remove free travel for under-18s as part of a TfL deal, which was rejected by the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan;
11. Tower Hamlets Council funds a wide range of tackling poverty measures, including providing a Council Tax Reduction Scheme with council tax reductions of up to and including 100% depending on circumstances (meaning the most disadvantaged don't have to pay a single penny of council tax), of which nearly 32,000 households in the borough receive some level of council tax discount. The council also funds holiday hunger programmes and provides universal FSM to all primary school pupils, going significantly beyond the Government-funded FSM programme which only funds FSM for some children;
12. That our Tackling Poverty work and other support schemes are under increasing threat unless the Government adequately funds the council.

This Council believes:

1. That until we fully understand what money has been received from government in COVID support and the forecast costs of COVID for 202/21 we are not in a position to understand whether or not the government has met its commitments.
2. That there may be excess COVID funds available this year to supplement government programmes for example by buying extra laptops.

1. That since 2010, austerity has significantly affected our children and young people, with child poverty on the increase;
2. That the Government's approach to supporting people during the pandemic—leaving families to sink or swim—is having a devastating impact;
3. The Government has failed our children and young people.

This Council resolves:

1. To condemn the Government for its failure to tackle child poverty;
2. To ask the Mayor and Cabinet Member to write to every member of the council, setting out how Tower Hamlets Council is tackling poverty in the borough, supporting families, and how the council is working to seize every chance for every child or young person to be healthy, safe and successful;
3. To demand that the Department for Education responds to the points raised in this motion, and to warn that Tower Hamlets Council's Tackling Poverty work and other support schemes are under increasing threat unless the Government adequately funds the council;
4. To continue to lobby the Government for proper funding for our schools, councils and youth services, and to continue to lobby against detrimental changes to the welfare safety net.

5. Not to lobby or to write to the department for extra money and support until it fully understands its own financial situation as regards the direct impact of COVID in 2020/21. That if there is then a gap in financial support to lobby the government to fill that gap.
6. To update its press releases with the latest financial news, updating the 5th August news release with the latest financial information on COVID.

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Agenda Item 8

LABOUR GROUP AMENDMENT TO THE OPPOSITION MOTION FOR DEBATE FROM THE CONSERVATIVE GROUP – REGARDING FIRE SAFETY & THE SECURITY OF THE HOUSING SECTOR IN TOWER HAMLETS

Proposer: Councillor Sirajul Islam

Seconder: Councillor Eve McQuillan

Inserted text underlined and deleted text scored out.

This Council notes:

Shortly after the Grenfell fire, the council wrote to the owners and managing agents of over 700 private sector tall buildings.

Following responses from landlords and further investigations by officers the council identified 39 private sector residential buildings with ACM and a further 10 under investigation.

Council officers are in liaison with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, the Greater London Authority, and London Councils on this matter.

That 282 buildings in Tower Hamlets have registered for the government's £1bn building safety fund to fix cladding issues. That the local authorities with the next highest numbers of affected buildings were Manchester with 136 buildings, 130 in Newham, 127 in Westminster, 126 in Southwark, 102 in Greenwich.

That this list does not include most housing association properties which have a separate application process.

That this list also does not include other buildings with non-ACM cladding issues but where there are other fire safety issues. And it also does not include any building under 18 meters in height.

~~It is therefore probable that the total number of buildings affected by fire safety issues in Tower Hamlets may be between 300 and 400. Tens of thousands of residents must be affected by this.~~

~~That there is almost no information in the public domain about which buildings are affected except for some examples quoted in Council documents (Maltings and Brewster) or where residents have advertised their problems.~~

~~That some of these buildings were built by developers still active in the Borough although some buildings affected were built decades ago.~~

Tower Hamlets Council officers meet weekly to monitor progress with the remediation of blocks with ACM and the work of this group has widened to include collating the results of the External Wall Systems Survey (EWS).

In respect of EWS, the council has written to over 800 building owners and has

received 673 replies to the online survey. All returns from building owners are being entered on to a Government database which is checked by government and the council, with council officers undertaking further checks where more investigation is needed.

The NLA Tall Building Survey 2020 shows 78 tall buildings in the planning pipeline in Tower Hamlets with 18 completed in 2019. Both numbers substantially in excess of any other Borough.

It is clear that Tower Hamlets is the home of both the most tall buildings (as well as tallest) and the greatest number of buildings with fire safety issues

We welcome the government's Hackett review and will lobby for changes to building regulations – which include fire safety regulations – to be robust. The GLA is also producing policy on Fire Safety in the London Plan. We will ensure plans in Tower Hamlets comply with this.

This Council further notes:

That residents face huge uncertainty in two areas;

1. Living in buildings whose fire safety is suspect or where regulations are now different, who may now have 247 fire wardens and emergency evacuation procedures;
2. Living with huge financial uncertainty that could result in bankruptcy, inability to sell their properties, increased service charges or financially crippling bills;

That housing associations may also face financial pressures for similar reasons.

The draft Building Safety Bill which puts the financial onus on homeowners rather than those who built, approved, signed off or regulated those buildings.

That some buildings were approved by Tower Hamlets Council own building control team, although we note that the team were assessing in accordance with the regulations at the time.

That as yet except for national charities like Leasehold Knowledge Partnership and neighbour assisting neighbour there is no local help nor advice available. Residents are having to become experts on these issues but with no support nor assistance.

The funding available from central government to remediate both ACM and EWS issues is inadequate and could leave leaseholders bearing the brunt of costly remediation work.

That on the 13th November 2019 an amended motion 11.1 Motion regarding Restoring Fairness to the Leasehold System was adopted by Tower Hamlets Council and that the CMA issued its investigation report in February 2020.

This Council resolves:

- That we ~~need to compile~~ urge the Government to publish a database of every affected building of all types, so that we capture in detail the kinds of problems, types of buildings, height etc;
- That list needs to be published in a summarised and anonymised way so that we understand the scale of the issue in Tower Hamlets and across the country, how many residents live in unsafe buildings?;
- That we call on the Government to make access to the building remediation fund less complicated and time consuming;
- That where developers are submitting new planning applications but have unresolved issues in their older buildings which they have chosen to not help resolve that they justify why they should be allowed to build again, although we note that the applicants themselves are not a material consideration and that applications are assessed on their merits in accordance with relevant development plan policies;
- That we ask the Lead Members and officers to explore and report back on:
 - What advice is already available, and whether it would be beneficial to add to the advice already available through ~~That we establish~~ using s106 or New Homes Bonus LIF to funds a Help & Advice team for a time limited period (3 years tbc), whose role it is could be to advise residents and to keep them informed as well as ensure developers and managing agents are aware of their responsibilities;
 - ~~That LBTH provide~~ providing assistance with access to planning permission/building regs if required for Fire Remediation and also access to technical drawings for older buildings which are not on the LBTH portal for free if the purpose is to deal with fire safety issues;
 - That A piece of work to sit alongside the High Density Living Supplementary Planning Document ~~be expanded to~~ with a focus on the management issues caused by tall buildings as well as fire issues even if it can only include recommendations;
- That we ask government to expand the funding available to deal with these issues as it cannot be right for home owners to foot the bill for failures in regulation and oversight by professionals and government;
- That S106 is paid to deliver on specific issues so cannot be used for remediation, but where a building has fire safety issues ~~and where the s106 remains unspent that it be spent on resolving these issues~~, it would be unfair for residents to have to pay s106, which remains unspent and then again to fix their homes;
- ~~That the same is done for any buildings that gained New Homes Bonus for us.~~

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Amendment to Audit Committee Annual Report 2019/2020

The following paragraph on page 5 of the report is incorrect:

Approval of 2018/19 Annual Financial Accounts

The Annual Financial Accounts are signed off by the Committee in July each year. However, the Financial Accounts for 2018/19 were delayed due to issues regarding the accounting methods used to account and reconcile entries on the journal. The methodology used has been scrutinised by the external auditors and issues have been worked through to ensure that going forward the Council has robust accounting procedures in place. The Chair and Committee members have received regular updates on the progress being made and are pleased to report the Annual Financial Accounts for 2018/19 were signed off by the Committee at its May 2020 meeting

And will be replaced with the following paragraph:

Approval of 2018/19 Annual Financial Accounts

The Annual Financial Accounts are normally approved by the Audit Committee in July each year. However, completion of the accounts for 2018/19 has been delayed due to various errors that have required extensive corrective action. The Chair and Committee members have received regular updates on the progress being made. A revised set of accounts was presented to the Audit Committee in May 2020. The Committee noted these accounts and the progress made. The final accounts will be presented to the Audit Committee for approval once the external audit is complete.

Councillor Val Whitehead, Chair of the Audit Committee

18 November 2020

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Tower Hamlets Council
Council meeting 18th November 2020

Report on Governance Model Referendum – proposed alternative recommendations

Proposer: Cllr Andrew Wood

Seconders: Cllr Peter Golds and Cllr Rabina Khan

This Council resolves:

- To agree to the principle of a referendum in 2021 or 2022 but not rush into a fixed choice today without due process, we can learn from what other Councils have done to guide us;
- That if there is not enough time for a full debate tonight that we hold a dedicated Council meeting on this subject only in the coming month;
- That we ask for a working group to form with the help of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny which will report back to the next Council meeting on the 20th January with more detail on the choices available to us, timings and how we can make the decision;
- That no referendum be held until it is clear;
 - How each option will work in practise, who will hold responsibility & power?
 - What happens within 28 days of a vote for each option?
 - How and by whom the final two referendum choices are chosen and that this is done in public.
- That we ask the Head of Electoral Services what options exist to reduce the cost of a referendum later in 2021 by voting on a Saturday, using publicly owned facilities, counting delayed until a working day etc and to also report back to us on the 20th January;
- That we also consider a May 2022 referendum so that Mayoral candidates can make clear their views, and that voters can then decide whether to keep the Mayoral system or switch to an alternative model;
- That a referendum late in 2021 or 2022 would:
 - Allow time to formulate the referendum options in public;
 - Reduce the impact of COVID on polling stations;
 - Allow the referendum to be conducted in a neutral manner as would then be clear that the current Mayor continues in post until the May 2022 elections.
- That we engage the wider public before making any decision and that decisions are made with a full set of publicly available information after a detailed debate.

Background Information - Reasons for the proposed recommendations:

This Council notes:

1. A statement from the Mayor on the 10th November 2020 that “Tower Hamlets Labour Group has voted to trigger a referendum on whether the borough should keep the mayoral system or move to the ‘leader and cabinet’ system.” But when, how and on what information or advice that decision was made is unclear and is not in the public domain.
2. That both models that the Labour Group appear to have chosen are both ‘strong leader’ models where power and patronage are largely left in the hands of one person and only differ in who elects them, it is unclear whether the Labour group considered hybrid models of governance where you combine the leader model with one that gives more power to Councillors in policy making or in reviewing decisions made by the leader.
3. The lack of clarity over the type of Leader and Cabinet model chosen;
 - where the leader is elected annually as was the case in Tower Hamlets or for four years as practised elsewhere?
 - or what powers (if any) Cabinet members will have, individual cabinet member decision-making or collective cabinet decision-making or are all powers retained by the leader?
4. That the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, the national experts on this matter, based in Mansell Street in Tower Hamlets in their “*Rethinking governance, A summary of council activities on governance change*” detail how other Councils undertake these kind of decisions, it suggests that Tower Hamlets in the speed and brevity of its decision is very unusual.
5. Invitations extended to the Labour group as well as former Councillors from the Aspire/Tower Hamlets First party for an independently led online public debate on the 13th November, no response was received, ensuring that as a result no debate between the four governance options was possible in advance of this Council meeting.
6. Two petitions: one on the Council website, one on Change.org. favouring alternative options.
7. That our neighbours Newham Council undertook an independent Democracy and Civic Participation Commission which looked at a wide variety of issues including different options of governance and which met in public and reporting back on its findings.
8. That following that report Newham Councillors last month chose a different referendum choice, Committee system versus directly elected Mayor.
9. That in May 2010 after little public debate on the same day as national and locals elections and following a petition, that Tower Hamlets voters voted 60% for the new Executive Mayoral system, and only 40% to keep the existing Leader and Cabinet model. That might suggest dissatisfaction with the then Leader and Cabinet model.

This Council further notes:

That the Council paper contains almost no detail on alternative models (unlike the Newham papers) and is unclear about what the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny call hybrid models. There is only a brief reference at item 3.9 *“It should also be noted that within each model there are additional governance arrangements that can be adopted including the delegation of powers.”*

That across England there are broadly six broad governance choices available to us and used by other Councils:

1. A leader-cabinet system with individual cabinet member decision-making;
2. A leader-cabinet system with collective cabinet decision-making.
3. A Mayor, with various different approaches to cabinet autonomy;
4. A traditional committee system;
5. A streamlined committee system;
6. A hybrid system;

That the Centre for Scrutiny have said that while a full year is required for a full governance review that if options are limited that things could be undertaken more quickly.

That in the Council paper it says that following a referendum (note underline)

3.21 If a referendum is held and there is a majority vote in favour for a change of governance arrangements, within 28 days of the poll date, the Council must pass a second resolution to implement the change in a Special Council Meeting held for this purpose and if necessary transitional arrangements agreed.

That it is not clear what transitional arrangements mean, that Newham Council in its report did not include this term, they are clearer that any change is implemented within 28 days.

That once you have a referendum that decision cannot be changed for another ten years.

This Council believes:

Decisions should be made in public through an informed independent debate with clear information and that we are assisted by external experts.

That we need to learn lessons from the Brexit referendum including about the importance of making clear what happens as a result of each referendum choice.

That a referendum on the 6th May 2021 mean that if the Leader and Cabinet model is chosen that means its implementation within 28 days results in the removal from office of the current Mayor John Biggs, as he is not a Councillor. That inevitably the referendum could become mixed up with the performance of the current Mayor, that this would be an error and a diversion from what is a very serious choice.

That even next May COVID will be an issue and that polling stations will need to maintain social distancing and that the more ballot papers the slower the process and the greater the risk to participants.

That the results of any referendum must be implemented promptly and before people vote there should be clarity about what happens next, that transitional arrangements cannot last for a year until May 2022.

That important decisions that will last for ten years need greater scrutiny, preparation and debate as has been undertaken by other Councils. That decisions made in haste are often repented later.