

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS****MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL****HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 19 JANUARY 2022****THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5  
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG****Members Present:**

Mayor John Biggs*	Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Faroque Ahmed	Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Kabir Ahmed*	Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Rajib Ahmed*	Councillor Tarik Khan*
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	Councillor James King
Councillor Amina Ali	Councillor Eve McQuillan*
Councillor Asma Begum	Councillor Harun Miah*
Councillor Rachel Blake	Councillor Victoria Obaze*
Councillor Kevin Brady	Councillor Mohammed Pappu
Councillor Mufedah Bustin	Councillor Leema Qureshi
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	Councillor Zenith Rahman*
Councillor Shad Chowdhury	Councillor Candida Ronald
Councillor Dipa Das*	Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan*
Councillor David Edgar*	Councillor Dan Tomlinson
Councillor Marc Francis	Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Peter Golds*	Councillor Abdal Ullah*
Councillor Ehtasham Haque	Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman
Councillor Danny Hassell	Councillor Val Whitehead
Councillor Mohammed Ahabab Hossain*	Councillor Bex White
Councillor Asma Islam*	Councillor Andrew Wood*

\*Councillors present in person in the Council Chamber.  
(Remaining Councillors attended from remote locations).

**The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Mohammed Ahabab Hossain in  
the Chair**

The Speaker of the Council provided his update to the Council. He advised that he was pleased to have been able to participate in many events and activities in the community over the last couple of months. The highlights included:

- A number of events celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Bangladesh independence, highlighting the richness of Bangladeshi culture, and the community's close friendship with Britain and Tower Hamlets.

- Celebrations to mark a number of other key events such as: the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and a cultural celebration of Malaysia.
- Participation in tree planting activities across the Borough to commemorate those lost to Covid-19, to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Independence of Bangladesh and as part of The Queen's Green Canopy.
- Many festive celebrations in December. These included the lighting up of the Christmas Tree in Trafalgar Square, the switching on of the Aberfeldy Christmas Lights, Mayor of London's Carol Service, Tower Hamlets Homes festive celebration and the LBTH staff carol service.

The Speaker was also pleased to report that he was finally able to hold the Speaker's Charity Ball raising money for local charities. He thanked everyone who supported this event, in particular the sponsors: the Canary Wharf Group, Poplar HARCA and Hill Partnerships. The Speaker also looked forward to personally thanking those that had made such a difference to the community at the forthcoming Civic Awards.

The Speaker also noted that January marks Tamil Heritage Month, and that Pongal – the Harvest Festival – commenced on 14th January. It was hoped that the celebrations went well.

Finally, he was pleased to announce that the ICC World Cup Trophy was on display at the Town Hall this evening, as part of the Bowl Out Racism campaign. Members were welcomed to view and have their photographs taken with the trophy.

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Sufia Alam (maternity leave)
- Councillor Shah Ameen
- Councillor Ayas Miah
- Councillor Puru Miah
- Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
- Councillor Krysten Perry

Apologies for lateness were received on behalf of Councillors Marc Francis and Danny Hassell

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest were reported.

**3. MINUTES****RESOLVED:**

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and the Speaker be authorised to sign them accordingly.

**4. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE SPEAKER OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

The Chief Executive provided his regular update regarding the following issues:

- Covid - 19 and Vaccines. Whilst the Council were mindful that the infection rates had generally declined in the Borough, concerns remained about the increase in rates of infections in primary school age ranges and the increase in hospital and critical admissions. 231,415 have been vaccinated and the Council continues to work hard with the NHS to encourage take up of the vaccine and the Booster Jabs, where necessary.
- The Council has also been working hard to minimise the impact of Omicron on staff sickness levels. He apologised for any inconvenience this had caused, particularly in relation to the increased sickness rates in waste and recycling, home to school transport and those supporting vulnerable people.
- Award Success – He was pleased to report on the strong performance of local schools in relation to the Healthy School Awards in London, and their appearance in the Sunday Times top 100. Victoria Park had also once again been named as one of the 10 People's Choice winners.
- Peer Challenge revisit. He advised that a report on this matter will be submitted to the Cabinet shortly. Further service focused peer visits were also planned
- Staffing update. He was pleased to confirm that the following senior officers will be joining the Council shortly:
  - Susannah Beasley-Murray, the new Director of Supporting Families.
  - Musrat Zaman, as the Director of Workforce, OD and Business Support.

**5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS**

Maya Nessa and others addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners, and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Sabina Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Sports then responded to the matters raised in the petition.

She expressed apologies for any inconvenience that had been caused to the Petitioner and the customers of the facilities.

She also stated that she was mindful of the use of the access route as a short cut by customers and the decision to take action to prevent any further loss of income from this practice.

She also noted that the female customers could still directly access the changing rooms and the female only facilities, under the new arrangements at minimal inconvenience. Customers may also use the mix changing facilities as well as the female changing only rooms available at the pool, if they wished.

She also emphasised that the Council placed great importance on the provision of women only facilities. This is why in Mile End, it had increased the opening hours of these facilities.

She expressed a willingness to meet with the Petitioners to discuss the concerns further.

### **RESOLVED**

1. That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Children and Culture for a written response within 28 days.

## **6. MAYOR'S REPORT**

The Mayor presented his report to the Council.

The Opposition Group Leader's then responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

- Councillor Peter Golds, Leader of the Conservative Group.
- Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Leader of the Aspire Group.

The Mayor provided concluding remarks.

## **7. ADMINISTRATION MOTION DEBATE - HOUSING DELIVERY**

Councillor Danny Hassell **moved** and Mayor John Biggs **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda.

Councillor Andrew Wood **moved** and Councillor Peter Golds **seconded** an amendment to the motion (as set out in the supplementary agenda).

Added text is underlined

~~Deleted text is scored out.~~

This Council notes that:

1. The housing crisis is the greatest challenge facing London today. Having an affordable, secure home is difficult for many people due to rising private rents and a lack of genuinely affordable homes.

2. That the population in the Tower Hamlets borough is one of the fastest growing in London.
3. As of 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021, Tower Hamlets Council has delivered the following:
  1. 827 ~~new~~ homes – ~~completed and~~ occupied. These are a combination of new build (including 157 (tbc) properties built by private developers as s106 housing) and purchases of old homes the purchase of 422 old properties including:
    - 173 Right to Buy properties
    - 224 from Poplar Harca (but not from any other housing association)
    - 25 out of Borough (many in Erith it appears)
  2. 224 new build homes are on site and under construction.
  3. 184 new build homes awaiting contractor appointment, finances approved and planning secured.
4. Additionally, we are working on the next phase of new council homes, including:
  1. 42 homes with planning permission secured and funding being finalised.
  2. 451 mainly new build homes have been allocated funding and are moving towards planning permission
  3. 318 further homes are in the pipeline or in appraisal.
5. In total this would total 2,046 additional council homes including homes that would have been bought by or were already owned by housing associations so the net increase in affordable homes is a lot less than 2,046
6. The successful securing of £32m in grant funding from the Mayor of London's Affordable Housing Programme to fund an additional 194 new homes for social rent in the borough. London got £3,465 million for new affordable homes in the most recent round of government money given to the Mayor of London to allocate within London to Boroughs and housing associations. Tower Hamlets Council only got £32 million of this money (or 0.9% of the total) for 194 homes (0.7% of the total). By comparison Tower Hamlets has been set a target to deliver 6.6% of all new homes in London. Some other housing associations based in Tower Hamlets like Poplar Harca have got money as well. By contrast Barking & Dagenham Council got £171 million and Newham Council £92 million.
7. The introduction of a local lettings plan where 25% of completed homes can be let to households on the Common Housing Register who

already live on the estates where the new homes are built: for example; Jubilee Street.

8. The development and launch of the Intermediate Housing Register of Interest (launched 1st October 2021), which will give initial priority and access to local residents for all new intermediate housing in the borough.
9. The approval of the 'Affordable Self-Build' Programme with the first 2 of 4 sites having been awarded to the community self-build groups.
10. Since 2015/16 to December 2021, registered providers have delivered over 5,900 new affordable homes in the borough mostly built by private sector developers as part of their s106 planning obligations. Most of these are in Isle of Dogs, Aldgate and Aberfeldy areas.
11. The housing revenue account is used to fund new homes, but also manage current housing and deliver improvements to existing council homes.
12. In the new Tall Building SPD the Council suggests locations for 62 new tall buildings across Tower Hamlets (in addition to those already in the planning system), 56 of them or 90% in the E14 area
  - i) 45 new buildings on the Isle of Dogs & South Poplar - 18 to the south of Canary Wharf plus 27 to the north in Poplar & Billingsgate
  - ii) 11 in the Lower Lea Valley - in the Aberfeldy area
  - iii) 4 City Fringe - 2 in Aldgate, 2 next to the Royal London Hospital
  - iv) 2 Central - in Queen Mary area - this is the biggest area in TH & parts have excellent transport links

This Council believes that:

1. That Tower Hamlets is on the frontline in the battle to tackle the capital's housing crisis, and is working with the Mayor of London to do our bit to help solve it using government grant money allocated by the Mayor of London, borrowing from the governments Public Work Loans Board (helped when Theresa May lifted the borrowing cap), developer contributions as part of their s106 obligations, current and future rental income and Right to Buy receipts.
2. We should continue to work with registered providers to deliver good quality and affordable homes for residents and not compete with them to buy new s106 housing that they would have bought instead of us.
3. Whilst there have been some changes to the use of 'Right to Buy' (RTB) receipts, councils should be permitted to allocate 100% of receipts to deliver new council housing and also combine RTB receipts to other grant funding for schemes.
4. The government should provide sufficient funding to councils and other housing associations to meet targets on carbon neutral homes and to

address fire and building safety, helping reduce the pressures on funding available for building new homes.

5. We need genuinely affordable homes developed with the right infrastructure in the right place.
6. We need to demonstrate our ability to look after buildings that we own, to have a maintenance plan in place, to have a long-term strategy of renewal and replacement of equipment in place and to deal with climate change through making our energy intensive leisure centres and our residential communal boilers carbon neutral.

This Council resolves:

1. To share this motion with the Secretary of State for Levelling-Up, Communities and Housing to share the good work that the Council is doing to provide housing in the borough and to call for the Government to work with all Local Authorities to help resolve the housing crisis once and for all.
2. To lobby for changes to use of right to buy receipts and for funding to support councils and housing associations to deliver new homes and improve the quality of their existing stock.
3. To continue to work with the Mayor of London and the Deputy Mayor for Housing to ensure more genuinely affordable housing is built for those in need.
4. To support the Mayor and Cabinet in ongoing work to deliver more genuinely affordable homes and the vital infrastructure that must go alongside housing.
5. Not to lose any more Right to Buy receipts because the money was not spent in time (even if the government now agree that money can be held by the GLA)
6. To provide a detailed breakdown of the homes being acquired in order to make clearer:
  1. The age of buildings acquired and the cost of their renovation
  2. Which wards they are located in and from whom we bought them
  3. Who manages them
  4. Whether we bought them in competition with other housing associations, which might run the risk of an overall reduction in the delivery of new affordable homes in Tower Hamlets
  5. Whether genuinely new build homes commissioned by this Council since June 2015

**Procedural Motion.**

Under Council Procedure Rule, 12.1 (k), Councillor Tariq Khan **moved** and Mayor John Biggs **seconded** a proposal that the meeting is adjourned for five minutes at 7:55pm to allow the Administration to consider the proposed amendment from Councillor Andrew Wood. This was put to the vote and was **agreed**. The meeting resumed at 8pm.

This amendment moved by Councillor Andrew Wood was put to the vote and was **defeated**

This motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

**RESOLVED****This Council notes that:**

1. The housing crisis is the greatest challenge facing London today. Having an affordable, secure home is difficult for many people due to rising private rents and a lack of genuinely affordable homes.
2. That the population in the Tower Hamlets borough is one of the fastest growing in London.
3. As of 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021, Tower Hamlets Council has delivered the following:
  - a. 827 new homes. – completed and occupied. These are a combination of new build and purchases.
  - b. 224 new build homes are on site and under construction.
  - c. 184 new build homes awaiting contractor appointment, finances approved and planning secured.
4. Additionally, we are working on the next phase of new council homes, including:
  - a. 42 homes with planning permission secured and funding being finalised.
  - b. 451 mainly new build homes have been allocated funding and are moving towards planning permission
  - c. 318 further homes are in the pipeline or in appraisal.
5. In total this would total 2,046 additional council homes
6. The successful securing of £32m in grant funding from the Mayor of London's Affordable Housing Programme to fund an additional 194 new homes for social rent in the borough.
7. The introduction of a local lettings plan where 25% of completed homes can be let to households on the Common Housing Register who already live on the estates where the new homes are built: for example; Jubilee Street.
8. The development and launch of the Intermediate Housing Register of Interest (launched 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021), which will give initial priority and access to local residents for all new intermediate housing in the borough.
9. The approval of the 'Affordable Self-Build' Programme with the first 2 of 4 sites having been awarded to the community self-build groups.
10. Since 2015/16 to December 2021, registered providers have delivered over 5,900 new affordable homes in the borough.



11. The housing revenue account is used to fund new homes, but also manage current housing and deliver improvements to existing council homes.

**This Council believes that:**

1. That Tower Hamlets is on the frontline in the battle to tackle the capital's housing crisis, and is working with the Mayor of London to do our bit to help solve it.
2. We should continue to work with registered providers to deliver good quality and affordable homes for residents.
3. Whilst there have been some changes to the use of 'Right to Buy' (RTB) receipts, councils should be permitted to allocate 100% of receipts to deliver new council housing and also combine RTB receipts to other grant funding for schemes.
4. The government should provide sufficient funding to councils and other housing associations to meet targets on carbon neutral homes and to address fire and building safety, helping reduce the pressures on funding available for building new homes.
5. We need genuinely affordable homes developed with the right infrastructure.

**This Council resolves:**

1. To share this motion with the Secretary of State for Levelling-Up, Communities and Housing to share the good work that the Council is doing to provide housing in the borough and to call for the Government to work with all Local Authorities to help resolve the housing crisis once and for all.
2. To lobby for changes to use of right to buy receipts and for funding to support councils and housing associations to deliver new homes and improve the quality of their existing stock.
3. To continue to work with the Mayor of London and the Deputy Mayor for Housing to ensure more genuinely affordable housing is built for those in need.
4. To support the Mayor and Cabinet in ongoing work to deliver more genuinely affordable homes and the vital infrastructure that must go alongside housing.

**8. OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE - REGARDING SPITALFIELDS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Councillor Peter Golds **moved** and Councillor Andrew Wood **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda.

The motion was put to a vote and was **defeated**.

**9. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES****9.1 Report of Cabinet: Annual Plan for the Youth Justice Board 2021/22**

The Council considered the report of Cabinet setting out the Annual Plan for the Youth Justice Board 2021/22 under the Budget and Policy Framework Procedures.

**RESOLVED:**

1. Approve the Annual Youth Justice Plan 2021-22 for Tower Hamlets and the City of London.

**Procedural Motion.**

Under Council Procedure Rule 12.1 (c), Councillor Rabina Khan **moved** and Councillor Peter Golds **seconded** a proposal that the order of business be changed to consider Item 12.3, Motion regarding the Re-Opening of St Georges Swimming Pool as the next item of business, (on urgency grounds). This was put to the vote and was **defeated**.

**9.2 Report of the Audit Committee: Treasury Management Mid-Year Report for 2021-22**

The Council considered the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report for 2021-22

**RESOLVED:**

1. To note the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report for 2021-22

**9.3 Report of the General Purposes Committee: Post-election polling places review 2021**

The Council considered the report of the General Purposes Committee setting out the post-election polling places review 2021.

**RESOLVED:**

1. To note the conclusions of the post-election review of polling places in Tower Hamlets.
2. To note the responses received and to approve the polling place proposals set out in the report.
3. To agree that where the allocation of a polling place has yet to be determined that the Returning Officer make the final decision to allocate places for the polls to be held in May 2022.

## **10. OTHER BUSINESS**

### **10.1 Updates to the Mayor's Executive Scheme of Delegation**

The Council considered the report setting out updates to the Mayor's Executive Scheme of Delegation

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. Note the changes to the Executive Scheme of Delegations.

### **10.2 Appointment of Independent Persons**

The Council considered the report regarding the Appointment of Independent Persons

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. Appoint Amanda Orchard as an Independent Person with effect from 20 January 2022 for a four year term of office.
2. Re-appoint Rachael Tiffin as an Independent Person for a second four-year term of office with effect from 20 January 2022.
3. To note that the remuneration for an Independent Person is currently set at £1000/year.

## **11. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

The following questions and in each case supplementary questions were put (except where indicated) and were responded to by the Mayor or relevant Executive Member:

### **11.1 Question from Councillor Amina Ali:**

Given the on-going Omicron wave, can the Lead Member provide an update on what the Council is doing to ensure all residents are provided with the opportunity to receive two doses of the vaccination along with the booster jab?

#### **Response of Councillor Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing:**

Thank you for your work with people in encouraging the take up of the vaccine in the Borough.

In December, the Government announced a rapid expansion of the Covid – 19 booster programme. We had already by then established important relationships and partnerships with grass root organisations to encourage take up of the vaccine.

As at last week, the Partnership had administered over 109,000 booster doses, which was the equivalent of 53% of the eligible population.

The Council has played a really critical role in terms of making buildings available, and working in partnership with the NHS.

I am particularly proud of the work we have done to provide culturally competent engagement with grass root organisations to support our diverse community.

No supplementary question was asked.

### **11.2 Question from Councillor Kabir Ahmed:**

The Mayor will have seen reports circulating on social media that in response to an FOI request the Council has revealed that it has spent some £156 million over the last three years via the “AP1” voucher procedures. Will the Mayor please explain to the Council the following:

- a) what the procedures for authorising an AP1 payment are?
- b) whether there are any caps on the sums which may be spent via the AP1 procedure?
- c) whether it is correct that AP1 procedures are used for spending in “exceptional circumstances”?
- d) whether the Mayor was made or became aware of this level of spending using the AP1 procedure before the FOI response was made public?

### **Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

It's not as sensational as suggested by the question. This was a fairly routine process, by which the Council manages payments. API payments are authorised by the budget holder, based on the Council's Scheme of Delegation. There are additional levels of authorisation rather than an upper limit – with the larger decisions taken by more Senior Officers.

There are limits on how a BACs or a CHAPs payment may take place. They are not only used for exceptional payments, but in incidences where there are no invoices, where it's a non regular payment. Property transactions is a fairly significant example of that. Other examples would be ad hoc foster career allowances, grants paid out by the Council's refunds and long service awards.

The procedures are used for a wide variety of purposes. Every council had such procedures. I welcome scrutiny on this matter and public and press interest in this.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Kabir Ahmed:**

Can you explain the circumstances around purchase of free homes in Erith – including – how they were identified, was it value for money, and who authorised the purchase?

**Mayor John Biggs' response to supplementary question:**

In relation to this matter, my understanding is that we purchased properties for temporary accommodation. This had provided a far better standard of temporary housing than some of the private rented accommodation, which can be of a very low quality. Erith is within the travel policy as defined by housing policy over many years. Whilst we try to provide homeless places in the Borough, we also work hard to sources homes in other London Boroughs, and do better in relation to this than many other Borough regarding locating people in the Borough.

If you wish for a detailed breakdown of this matter and how this was accessed, I will make sure this is provided.

**11.3 Question from Councillor Leema Qureshi:**

Victory Day took place on 17th December 2021 which marks the independence of Bangladesh and it is a special day for many residents in the borough. Can the Mayor update us on what the Council did to mark this important occasion?

**Response of Councillor Sabina Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Sports:**

Victory Day took place on 17th December 2021. It's a very special day for many residents in the Borough. We arranged for St Georges and the Bromley Public Hall to be lit up in red and green. In addition, a special concert had also been planned with Queen Mary's University of London. Due to the increasing rates of Covid – 19, and the fact we could not guarantee the health and safety of those attending, the Council, in conjunction with Public Health and QMU, cancelled the live event. The artists due to perform were filmed at the Queen Mary's Great Hall on 17<sup>th</sup> December, and links to this are on our website and the Tower Hamlets You Tube Channel.

No supplementary question was asked.

**11.4 Question from Councillor Peter Golds:**

What communication has LBTH had with the Royal Borough of Greenwich as regards the non-working lift(s) at Island Gardens and Cutty Sark serving the Greenwich foot tunnel?

**Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

I have contacted the Royal Borough of Greenwich and their Leader about the operation of the foot tunnel. More recently, Council Officers in Place have also been engaging with relevant staff at the Royal Borough. I am disappointed by the non operation of the lifts given many rely on these. This problem is however, to a certain extent, offset by the accessible services provided by the Docklands Light Railway. This allows people to get down to platform level by lift.

I understand that the preliminary works are due to start on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022 with the installation on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2022. The expected hand over date is 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022.

I think that the lifts need to be replaced in the longer term. The Council shares some of the costs of this with the Royal Borough of Greenwich. However they are responsible for the management of the tunnel.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Peter Golds:**

Thanks for confirming the timetable for this and the responsibility arrangements. Is there anything the Council can do to push this issue forward - given the importance of the foot tunnel for huge numbers of people in Tower Hamlets?

**Mayor John Biggs' response to supplementary question:**

We have escalated this issue. The Chief Executive has spoken to their same post at the Royal Borough of Greenwich. We have expressed concerns about the unavailability of the lifts. The Borough has sent us the bill for the cost and we have limited control over what can be done. I had proposed to Officers during the Covid pandemic closure, that the Council stop making our payment when the footpath was unilaterally closed to Tower Hamlets Residents, which I felt was disproportionate and unreasonable.

**11.5 Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed:**

Can the Mayor provide an update on how the Council is supporting the borough's COVID recovery during these continued uncertain times?

**Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

The Council has stepped up to provide a number of initiatives to support residents during the pandemic. This includes: delivering emergency food aid, PPE, as well as working with health partners in relation to key messages and the vaccination drive. We are also working to support businesses.

In June 2021, we agreed the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund, supporting 25 projects.

The grant element consists of the following:

- £190,000 committed to grants for supporting the voluntary sector.

- £350,000 for grants to businesses.
- £166,00 for grants to tackle loneliness.

The Mayor's Covid Recovery fund has already recruited 105 volunteers with:

- Over 460 residents in mental health and wellbeing training sessions.
- Over 150 residents in physical activity and healthy eating training sessions

Over 630 children and youth people have attended the summer holiday programme.

It has been a useful boost for the Borough during the pandemic and has helped the recovery. But we still need to do quite a lot to help people in the community to recover.

No supplementary question was asked

#### **11.6 Question from Councillor Harun Miah:**

Can the mayor update this chamber to aftermath of the very tragic incident at Nida House, Sutton street on the 11th of December 2021? Which sadly resulted in the death of 11 year old Fatiha Sabrin?

#### **Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

This was a very tragic event. I attended the building shortly after the incident and I laid some flowers. We have also helped in rehousing the households affected and with communicating with the landlord. We have also worked with the safety authorities on this matter.

I understand that virtually all of the families have moved back into the accommodation - with the exception of the family that had lost their child, who are living in temporary accommodation. We are looking to provide them with alternative arrangements.

We cannot control everything that people bring into their homes and unwittingly, someone had taken agricultural industrial type pesticide into a residential dwelling, resulting in this tragic incident.

We need to learn from that and emphasis the dangers to people of the use of such unregulated products

It was an usual and unprecedented incident. Our thoughts are with those affected by this.

No supplementary question was asked.

**11.7 Question from Councillor Zenith Rahman:**

Can the Lead Member please let us know many electric charge points are currently installed in the borough, and how many were installed by this administration since 2018?

**Response of Councillor Kahar Chowdhury, Cabinet Member for Highways and Public Realm:**

Tackling the climate emergency and air pollution are key priorities for the Council. Encouraging the switch to electric vehicles is a key part in delivering both of these aims.

There are currently 178 on street electric charging points installed in the Borough. 173 of which had been installed since April 2018.

Installing electric charge points is just one of a range of measures the Council are taking as part of our commitment to be a Net Zero Carbon Council by 2025 and an Net Zero Borough by 2045. The recently published Net Zero Partnership Action plan sets out a lot of this work.

No supplementary question was asked.

**11.8 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood:**

How much s106, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and New Homes Bonus money was in the Council bank account at the end of 2021?

**Response of Councillor Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing:**

I am always grateful for the opportunity to talk about the Council's investment in infrastructure and to support our vibrant and diverse community.

I can confirm that at the end of 2021, the following:

- In relation to s106 (provided by developers to mitigate the impact of development in accordance with restrictions) – we received 161.5M. Not all of which was capital.
- Regarding CIL (a per square metre levy, not restricted to a certain use) – 112.2M
- The New Homes Bonus, (a non - ringfenced grant allocated to Councils based on new homes provided) – 44.2M. Nearly all had been programme.

All of the information is in the public domain, through Cabinet and Council reports and is available on request

No supplementary question was asked.



**11.9 Question from Councillor Marc Francis:**

Will the Lead Member for Housing set out the actions that Tower Hamlets Council has taken to support residents of Clare House since Clarion Housing Group announced the evacuation of this tower block for fire safety reasons on 29th September 2021?

**Response of Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Housing:**

Since the Council became aware of the intended evacuation in September last year - we have been supporting residents during this very difficult time.

The decision to evacuate was a difficult and a complex exercise and an emotional event for residents being told that they would never return to their homes again.

The Council has regular meetings with Clarion Housing regarding such issues as: the quality of temporary accommodation, the permanent housing offer, Clarion's resident engagement strategy, resident welfare and the safety of the building, whilst some residents are still in occupation.

The Council has also provided British Red Cross humanitarian support for residents and advice on availability of serviced apartments.

We have also facilitated emergency priority on the common Housing register, with up to three offers of suitable housing for residents. The Council also processes application forms for those not on the housing register with speed. We will continue to work with Clarion about the future of Clare House and the re-provision of the housing.

I also wish to thank the Mayor, Councillor Francis, ward Cllrs and the MP for all your work on this matters and advocating for residents

**Supplementary question from Councillor Marc Francis:**

In October 2021, Clarion refused to provide a copy of a report by consultants about the structural integrity and fire safety of Clare House. In November, they tried to force tenants evacuated to relinquish their secure assured tenancy, when they moved into long term temporary accommodation. This was in return for an assured tenancy from a private landlord.

In December, they withdrew their promise to tenants evacuated – to provide three direct offers of a permanent home, directing them instead to a home seekers website.

By Christmas, only 10% of those tenants evacuated, received a permanent home.

Will the Lead Member and the Mayor agree to write to the Housing Minister to request that he meet with Clare House residents to understand their concerns

and that he intervene to get a more quicker and empathetic response by Clarion Housing Group?

**Councillor Danny Hassell's response to supplementary question:**

We share the concerns about the speed of the response. Whilst it's a logistically complex matter, we note that there are clearly areas where Clarion should have done more, quicker, and with more sympathy and empathy. Yes myself and the Mayor will be happy to make the representations you have suggested.

**11.10 Question from Councillor Dan Tomlinson:**

Could the Lead Member provide an update on the URS waste collection issues, detailing how many URS trucks are currently working and how long it will be until the out-of-action vehicles are back in action?

**Response of Councillor Asma Islam, Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning:**

As a Borough we have the largest number of URS sites. (Underground Refuse System) There are over 700 bins that can only be lifted by URS trucks. These vehicles provide a challenge for waste services. They are highly specialist vehicles, with not many in existence in the UK. We have had problems with ensuring that all three of our URS vehicles are operational in recent months, due to breakdowns and difficulties in repairing these specialist vehicles.

Actions plans are in place to ensure we have two URS vehicles available with a third acting as a spare. We are also expecting the delivery of a brand new URS vehicle soon. We have also experienced problems with staff shortages due to Covid – 19 related sickness. We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience this has caused. I want to assure you and our residents that we are working very hard to resolve the issues, and that we will continue with surface waste collection until the issues with the URS trucks has been addressed and they are fully track.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Dan Tomlinson:**

What further plans are in place to ensure the service is more resilient, particularly with reference to the introduction of the URS vehicle? This is a big issue particularly in my ward.

**Councillor Asma Islam's response to supplementary question:**

We note that improving resilience is key to addressing the issues and we wish to develop this further by the introduction of the three vehicles.

We are looking at the issues with officers - at how to improve the service, with the growth in the Borough to prevent problems arising again.

#### **11.12 Question from Councillor Victoria Obaze:**

The vibrancy of our neighbourhoods is just one of the many aspects that makes Tower Hamlets the best borough in London to live. The presence of offensive graffiti can have a really negative impact on the community. Can the Lead Member provide an update on what the Council is doing to keep the borough clean and safe from vandalism?

#### **Response of Councillor Asma Islam, Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning:**

The vibrancy of our neighbourhoods is just one of the key features that makes us the best Borough in London and graffiti has a negative effect on this.

We are targeting graffiti with an increase in removal activity, over the last 12 months. This is as part of our work to make Tower Hamlets cleaner, safer and fairer.

We are focusing our efforts to target:

- Hots spots to remove graffiti more quickly.
- Agree plans to target offenders, in partnership with the Police and Community Safety.
- Working on plans to ensure other landowners take responsibility for tackling graffiti on their land.

I am pleased to confirm that nearly 2000 locations across the Borough, blighted by graffiti had been cleared up over the last 8 months, including action by the Mayor to help with the clean up. This means that approx. 50,000 square metres, of graffiti (the size of seven full sized foot ball pitches) have been cleared away by council teams.

No supplementary question was asked.

#### **11.13 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan:**

How does the Mayor and the administration intend to reach vulnerable people, diverse communities geographically surrounding St George's, including those with protected characteristics, so that a fair proportion are able take part in the Leisure Strategy which is transparently referring to St George's Pool? (as set out in the supplementary agenda)

#### **Response of Mayor John Biggs:**

The consultation has been very difficult during Covid – 19, due to the constraints in reaching people. I am really looking forward to meeting people and attending public meetings. We have done the best we can in terms of the consultation in view of the restrictions. I refute the suggestion that we have failed against our Strategy in view of this.

I note the passion people feel about the pool and importance of this issue. This is why I have attended so many meetings and I intend to continue to do so. I have spoken to Councillor Khan and many other representatives.

I am committed to re - providing a swimming pool in the area. We have reached the conclusion that it cannot be refurbished in its current state. We are looking at the capital provision of that and a report will come to the Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2022. I think what we are proposing to do will be largely in accordance with the objections of residents regarding the risks of closing the pool and losing it.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Rabina Khan:**

I note your commitments. I would request again that the meeting is extended under procedure rules to debate Motion 12.3 regarding the St Georges Pool. It would be good for the residents to hear the debate.

**Mayor Biggs response to supplementary question:**

I have agreed to meet the main group who are active in this. I am happy to do this in person or on line, as well as yourself again and your fellow local ward Councillor. I have also been meeting with the St Katherine's and Wapping Councillors who have an interest in this matter. I agree it's an important asset.

Having received advice, we have reached the conclusion that it is at the end of its refurbishable life. The conclusion I have therefore reached, subject to the outcome of the public consultation, that it is best to relocate the pool on its current site, given the good transport links, proximity to the most neediest community, and the opportunities to provide a range of sports at the centre, but predominantly swimming.

Question 11.11 was not put due to the absence of the questioner. (Written response attached)

**12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

**12.1 Motion regarding Memorial to the Matchwomen and Matchgirls**

Councillor Sabina Akhtar **moved** and Councillor Rachel Blake **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda

This motion was put to the vote and was unanimously **agreed**.

**RESOLVED:**

**This Council believes:**

1. We have a proud modern history in Tower Hamlets of championing diversity and standing up to discrimination, but there is more we can do
2. That historically under-represented groups should be remembered in the public realm
3. That the women and girls who took part in the Match Factory Strike of 1888 were pioneers of the Labour Movement (see notes)

**This Council notes:**

1. The Council has pro-actively undertaking a review of race and equality in the public realm.
2. The purpose of the review was to share thoughts about under-representation in public spaces – not only in terms of race, but also on issues across the equalities landscape including but not limited to civil rights, workers', women's and LGBTQ+ rights and more.
3. The review asked the community identify and nominate other names, particularly of under-represented groups, who have done something memorable and who we should celebrate.

**This Council resolves:**

1. To welcome ideas for remembering the Matchwomen and Matchgirls who fought for their employment rights
2. To work with the Matchgirls Memorial Trust to remember the struggle of the Matchwomen and Matchgirls

(Motions 12.2- 12.3 were not considered due to lack of time).

The meeting ended at 10.05 p.m.

Speaker of the Council

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James Frankcom,  
Chairman of the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Forum

via email  
[info@spitalfieldsforum.org.uk](mailto:info@spitalfieldsforum.org.uk)

## Place Directorate

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20 January 2022

Dear Mr Frankcom

This letter sets out the current situation with the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Plan and the next steps available to the Council.

The examiner's report on the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Plan was received by the Council and the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Forum on 15 July 2021, and recommended that the neighbourhood plan be put to a public referendum subject to a number of modifications being made to it. The Council accepted this recommendation.

Under section 61H of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, an LPA may designate a neighbourhood planning area as a 'business area' if they consider the area to be wholly or predominantly business in nature. This was the case for the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Planning Area. In such cases, two referendums must be held on the neighbourhood plan that is prepared – one of residential voters, and one of businesses.

Accordingly, two referendums were arranged for 11 November 2021 – one for residents and one for businesses. The voters in the residential referendum voted 'yes' to the adoption of the neighbourhood plan; the business voters voted 'no' to the adoption in the business referendum.

Following this split outcome, the law now puts the onus back on the Council to decide whether or not to adopt the neighbourhood plan as part of the development plan for the Borough.

This is understood to be an unprecedented situation in the history of neighbourhood plans. As a result, the Council has been considering carefully how best to proceed.



Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area in ways that are aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the borough. It is clear that the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Forum has invested significant time and resource in developing the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Plan. However, the contrasting outcomes of the business and residential referendums suggest that significant elements of the business community in the area have concerns about the content of the plan.

In the spirit of neighbourhood planning, the Council would like to invite the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Forum to engage further with business representatives from the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Plan Area to explore the concerns that led to the outcome of the business referendum. This would be with a view to the Neighbourhood Forum preparing a written position statement for the Council by 20 May 2022 setting out (i) the main concerns raised by business representatives in these discussions; and (ii) the Neighbourhood Forum's answers to those concerns.

After receiving this position statement, the Council will make a decision about next steps.

It should be noted that Development Plan Documents such as Neighbourhood Plans are required to be approved by full Council. It is important that this item has sufficient time for debate and discussion and given that the Council meetings for the early part of 2022 will focus on budget setting, we will aim to discuss the item at the June or July full Council meeting.

Yours sincerely



**Ann Sutcliffe**  
**Corporate Director - Place**





### Responses to Questions not put at the Council meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022

#### 11.2 Question from Councillor Kabir Ahmed

##### **Supplementary question from Councillor Kabir Ahmed:**

Can you explain the circumstances around purchase of free homes in Erith – including – how they were identified, was it value for money, and who authorised the purchase?

##### **Response to supplementary question:**

AP1 payments are authorised by the budget holder based on the Council's scheme of delegation. There are additional levels of authorisation rather than an 'upper limit'.

The limit for a BACs (Bankers Automated Clearing Services) payment is £2.5m. Very often property transactions and many payments made by the Treasury team are above that level, or require same day transfers of funds, and require payment by CHAPs (Clearing House Automated Payment System) payments, all of which are made via the 'AP1' procedure.

'AP1' procedures are not only used for 'exceptional payments' but they are also used in any instance where there is no invoice or it's a 'non regular' payment. Examples would include ad-hoc foster carer allowances, grants paid out by the council, refunds and long service awards.

The 'AP1' procedures are used for a wide variety of different purposes – not just for payments made under 'exceptional circumstances'. The 'AP1' procedure is common for the use of high value and property transactions, and council procedures have been followed correctly.

In response to the specific point about purchasing homes in Erith, AP1s are used for certain types of payments, in this case to solicitors for holding funds against three intended leasehold property purchases in Erith.

As with many authorities facing huge demand for temporary accommodation for homeless households, properties were bought outside of the borough as they were less expensive and represented better value for money than those in borough. A small number, 24, out of borough properties were acquired to help meet demand. A major consideration in determining where to buy was the length of time it took to travel back to Tower Hamlets.

Properties were valued by independent valuers to ensure that the Council was paying the appropriate market price. The properties purchased in Erith were leasehold flats. One of the originally intended purchases fell through at the last moment necessitating the refund of money held by solicitors to the Council.

### **11.11 Question from Councillor Shah Ameen**

Can the Lead Member provide an update on what the Council is doing to improve air quality across the borough and protect the health of its residents?

#### **Response of Councillor Asma Islam, Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning:**

The council is currently consulting on the refreshed Air Quality Action Plan which will be brought to cabinet for approval in the Summer. The council currently operates 90 diffusion nitrogen dioxide monitoring tubes across the borough and has four continuous monitoring sites which monitor a range of pollutants. We are currently installing a further monitor along The Highway in Wapping.

Our successful School Streets programme improves air quality at schools by closing roads outside schools during pick up and drop off time.

We are also encouraging the switch to electric vehicles by installing electric charging points across the borough and penalising high-emissions vehicles by charging these vehicles more for resident parking permits.

The London Atmospheric Emissions Inventory released in December 2021 shows a significant improvement in all pollutant measures. For Tower Hamlets, 7.5% of the population now live in areas exceeding legal limit for NO<sub>2</sub> as opposed to 76.2% in 2016.

While this is a huge improvement, we need to go further to ensure that none of residents have to live in areas exceeding these legal limits.

A further 400 EV charging points are due by March 2023 - That's 150 by end this April and a further 250 by March 2023