LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL

HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 13 APRIL 2011

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG

Members Present:

Mayor Lutfur Rahman
Councillor Helal Abbas
Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed
Councillor Kabir Ahmed
Councillor Ohid Ahmed
Councillor Rajib Ahmed
Councillor Rofique U Ahmed
Councillor Tim Archer
Councillor Abdul Asad
Councillor Craig Aston
Councillor Lutfa Begum
Councillor Mizan Chaudhury
Councillor Alibor Choudhury
Councillor Zara Davis
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor David Edgar
Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Carlo Gibbs
Councillor Peter Golds
Councillor Carli Harper-Penman
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Ann Jackson
Councillor Dr. Emma Jones
Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Aminur Khan
Councillor Rania Khan
Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Anna Lynch
Councillor Md. Maium Miah
Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Fozol Miah
Councillor Mohammed Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Ahmed Adam Omer
Councillor Lesley Pavitt
Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Zenith Rahman
Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor David Snowdon
Councillor Bill Turner
Councillor Kosru Uddin
Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Abdal Ullah
Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman
Councillor Amy Whitelock

The Chair of Council, Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman, in the Chair

Sir Simon Milton and Rev. Michael Peet

Before commencing the formal business on the agenda, the Chair of Council said that Members would be aware of the recent sad deaths of Sir Simon Milton (Deputy Mayor of London) and Rev. Michael Peet (Rector of Bow), each of whom had in different ways made a significant contribution to the life of London and the borough. The Council's thoughts at this time were also with Councillor Kabir Ahmed who had recently suffered a family bereavement.

At the Chair's invitation, the Council, officers and public gallery rose to observe a minute's silence in memory of the deceased.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Shelina Aktar, Shahed Ali, Judith Gardiner, Shafiqul Haque, Denise Jones, Anwar Khan and Gloria Thienel.

RESOLVED

That the apologies for absence submitted be noted.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors made declarations of interests in items included on the agenda as follows:

Councillor	Item	Type of interest	Reason
Helal Abbas	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Khales Uddin Ahmed	12.7	Personal	Resident in car-free development
Rajib Ahmed	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Abdul Asad	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Lutfa Begum	8.10	Personal	Employed by PCT
Marc Francis	12.7	Personal	Resident in car-free development
Carlo Gibbs	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Ann Jackson	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Shiria Khatun	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Anna Lynch	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Ahmed Omer	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Joshua Peck	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Zenith Rahman	5.2	Personal	On Management Committee of Toyhouse Library Project
Zenith Rahman	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme

Rachael Saunders	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Bill Turner	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme
Motin Uz-Zaman	5.2	Personal	Toyhouse Library is based in my ward
Amy Whitelock	12.5	Personal	Member of LGA Pension Scheme

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the ordinary Council meeting held on 2nd February 2011, the Budget Council meeting held on 23rd February 2011 and the Extraordinary Budget Council meeting held on 8th March 2011 be confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings and the Chair of Council be authorised to sign them accordingly.

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

There was no business under this agenda item.

5. TO RECEIVE ANY PETITIONS

5.1 Petition from Mr Brian Nicholson and others regarding East End Life

Mr. Brian Nicholson addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Deputy Mayor, then responded to the issues raised.

Councillor Ahmed considered that East End Life represented value for money when set against the potential cost of advertising statutory notices and council services in other newspapers. It also promoted equality and diversity. Savings of £200k p.a. had already been agreed from East End Life. The Council welcomed the changes to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and the current review of East End Life was consistent with that.

RESOLVED

That the petition be referred to the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

5.2 Petition from Toyhouse Libraries Association of Tower Hamlets and others regarding the Family Play Project

Ms. Pip Pinhorn, Ms Seema Kapoor and Ms Nazmin Rahman addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Oliur Rahman, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, then responded to the issues raised.

Acknowledging the needs of the existing service users it was reported that the Mayor had requested that a review be undertaken of the service provision and the closure decision to identify if any alternative course of action was possible.

RESOLVED

That noting the request of the Mayor, the petition be referred to the Interim Corporate Director, Children, Schools and Families for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

6.1 **Question from Mr. Glenn Power**

"Tower Hamlets achieved Fairtrade status in 2006. Volunteers on the steering group would like to know what measures the Council would consider taking to increase its support for fair trade. Could officers consult with other Fairtrade councils, such as Bristol and Newcastle, to learn from their best practice?"

Response (by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member, Resources)

I would like to thank members of the Fairtrade Steering Group for their continuous support and hard work. It helped the Council receive Fairtrade status in 2006. We are very proud of this and committed to improve upon this status.

The Council launched the 'Fairtrade Caterers Scheme' which gives local caterers the incentive to buy Fairtrade goods. This has now become a popular scheme and well received by the catering sector. The Sustainable Development Team will continue to promote this scheme. Moving forward, the Council will work with other sectors including local statutory, voluntary and faith organisations to promote Fairtrade within Tower Hamlets.

We will continue to raise awareness and promote Fairtrade and fairly traded products among staff and residents. The council will also work with other local authorities to learn from best practice.

No supplementary question was asked.

Change in order of business

At this point Councillor Rania Khan moved, and Councillor Bill Turner seconded, 'that under Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied to enable motion 12.3 concerning Fairtrade to be debated immediately.'

The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed.**

Motion 12.3: Motion proposed by Councillor Rania Khan regarding Fairtrade

Councillor Rania Khan moved, and Councillor Alibor Choudhury seconded, the motion as printed in the agenda.

Following debate the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed** with no Member voting against. Accordingly it was:-

RESOLVED

This Council notes

- That fairly traded products guarantee stable, living wage prices to producers in poor countries around the world and fund community development projects including safe drinking water schemes, basic medical facilities and education.
- That Tower Hamlets was the first London borough to introduce the living wage when Mayor Lutfur Rahman was Leader of the Council.

This Council believes:

- That strengthening our commitment to Fairtrade entails exploring all opportunities for the Council to procure fairly traded products including giving clear guidelines to our procurement officers.
- That the Council should promote a culture of using and sourcing fairly traded products.

This Council resolves:

- To promote fairly traded products in Council's catering services to schools, social services, Ideas Stores and Council offices with vending machines.
- To include fairly traded products as part of the tender specifications of future catering contracts.
- To ask existing contractors to source fairly traded products at no extra cost.
- To promote our commitment to fairly traded products to local statutory, voluntary and faith organisations.

- To encourage our residents to use fairly traded products by occasional Council publicity.

6.2 **Question from Ms. Clare Harrisson**

"What is the Mayor doing to prevent the use of unlicensed mini cabs in the borough?"

Response (by Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Deputy Mayor)

In London, the licensing and control of mini cabs is the responsibility of Transport for London and the Police. The Council does not have direct responsibility in this area. But, we work in partnership with enforcement agencies. The Mayor and his administration are fully committed to ensure that illegal taxi touting and unlicensed mini cabs are properly addressed.

Recently, officers from the Metropolitan Police's specialist unlicensed taxi unit conducted operations in Tower Hamlets. They targeted unlicensed mini cabs and dealt with unsafe vehicles.

We take this issue very seriously. And we will work with the enforcement agencies to address this issue properly.

Summary of supplementary question: Could the Mayor and Council explain its actions in providing a reference for an unlicensed minicab driver who had been charged and was later convicted of a criminal offence of a sexual nature?

Summary of the Mayor's reply: I have provided references for a number of persons over the years that I have been a Councillor and in this one case I fully accept that I made a genuine mistake. My trust was abused and I have withdrawn the reference which was provided. Procedures have been strengthened to ensure that such an incident will not occur again in the future.

Change in order of business

At this point Councillor Peter Golds moved, and Councillor Joshua Peck seconded, 'that under Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied to enable motion 12.2 concerning character references to be debated immediately.'

The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed.**

Motion 12.2: Motion proposed by Councillor Peter Golds regarding character references

Councillor Peter Golds moved, and Councillor Tim Archer seconded, the motion as printed in the agenda.

Councillor Helal Abbas moved, and Councillor Shiria Khatun seconded, a tabled amendment as follows:-

"Delete from 'This Council believes': 'that Council staff time should not be expended in the production of these'; and

Delete point a) from 'Therefore, this Council resolves' and replace with: 'Council staff may continue to be involved in the production of character references only if Members of the Council dictate them to officers or submit them in writing'."

This amendment was accepted by Councillors Peter Golds and Tim Archer, who varied their substantive motion accordingly.

The substantive motion as amended was then put to the vote and was agreed with no Member voting against. Accordingly it was:-

RESOLVED

This Council notes that:

- Council staff have produced at least 120 character references on behalf of the Executive Mayor and Councillors since the May 2010 elections.
- The recent case of an unlicensed cab driver, jailed for sexual assault, who was reported to have provided character references from the Executive Mayor and 'several' Councillors prior to his being sent to jail.

This Council believes that:

- it is appropriate for councillors, on occasion, to provide character references and testimonials for outside bodies and constituents; but
- that members of the Council should be entirely responsible for references and testimonials that they provide to residents.

Therefore, this Council resolves:

- to instruct the Standards Committee to revise the existing guidance to state that:

a) Council staff may continue to be involved in the production of character references only if Members of the Council dictate them to officers or submit them in writing; and

b) All copies of character references and testimonials used for judicial and governmental agencies produced on Council stationery must be logged with the Monitoring Officer, who should keep a record of the number and type of such references and testimonials.

6.3 **Question from Ms. Seema Kapoor**

Question withdrawn as a petition on the same matter (the Family Play Project) had already been presented to the meeting.

6.4 **Question from Mr. James King**

"Could the Mayor update us on the progress of the campaign to overturn the appalling decision made by the London 2012 Organising Committee to backtrack on the promise made to run the Olympic marathon through the East End?'

Response (by Mayor Lutfur Rahman)

I share the disappointment that the marathon has been re-routed. But, I am sure you will agree with me that it is much better to focus on a series of certain gains than the uncertainty of a legal battle.

You and I both know that there is absolutely no certainty that we would have won a legal challenge against LOCOG. Also, I could not justify pursuing the judicial review at taxpayers' expense in these difficult times. We are saving every single penny we can.

Legal battles are extremely long and protracted. And we just have over a year to go before the Olympics. This is why I signed an agreement with Lord Coe on 21 February. It delivers a package that maximises the benefits for Tower Hamlets' residents.

- Residents will have priority access to 1,000 Olympics jobs
- Every child in the borough will have a Game time experience
- There will be a special event in the Borough to mark the arrival of the Olympic Torch
- We launched Brick Lane and Banglatown as Olympics' Curry Capital last week with Princess Anne and Lord Coe – this will boost business and the reputation of the area.
- There will be opportunities for local suppliers to engage with LOCOG main contractors.

Summary of supplementary question: Regarding the 'Curry Capital', can the Mayor guarantee that the borough's reputation will not be tarnished by association with persons and premises in Brick Lane and Banglatown who are under investigation for breaches of regulations in respect of the anti social activity of touting for business, breaches of

licensing laws or trading standards?

Summary of the Mayor's reply: I assure that we take touting and the other matters you mention very seriously and we are fully committed to ensuring that they are dealt with via enforcement powers.

7. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor made his report to the Council meeting.

He referred to the coalition government's tax and benefit changes which were negatively affecting a large section of the population especially in the Borough, although robust management of the Councils finances had ensured that unlike the position in many other authorities which were closing facilities such as SureStart centres or libraries, frontline services in Tower Hamlets were protected and with increased investment in schools and libraries planned to be rolled out.

The Mayor stated that he would continue to deliver improvements to the residents of the Borough and extended best wishes to those communities who would be celebrating forthcoming religious holidays.

The Leader of the Majority Group and Leaders of the Minority Groups each responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

8. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

8.1 Question from Councillor Kosru Uddin

"Given the impact of the recent cuts and loss of jobs and the subsequent rise in unemployment, in particular the significant rise in youth unemployment, what is the Mayor proposing to do to help address unemployment in the borough and help young residents who are out of work and bordering on the realms of disillusion and feelings of dejection?"

Response (by Councillor Oliur Rahman, Cabinet Member, Children's Services)

Tackling unemployment and helping more people into work is one of the key priorities of the Mayor. We have implemented a series of initiatives to help young unemployed into work. As a result, the number of young people aged 16-18 not in employment, education or training (NEET) is at an all time low of just 5.3%.

Youth unemployment of 18-24 year olds has in fact fallen by 2.8% since the Mayor came into office.

Clearly, we are making a difference. And we will ensure that this continues. Last month, our budget had some of the lowest compulsory redundancies in

London. People of Tower Hamlets can be proud that the Mayor is creating jobs and tackling youth unemployment.

We know for a fact that the Labour Group leadership were proposing to cut jobs, for example by getting rid of Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers. This is just one example.

If we look at the huge levels of job cuts in other Labour councils, we can get a sense of what a Labour budget would have looked like in Tower Hamlets. It would have meant thousands of people, including young people losing their jobs.

Let me tell you some of the initiatives that we have already delivered.

- We helped 600 more people into work through the council's Skillsmatch programme in the last year
- We have secured 1000 potential Olympics jobs - we are working to prepare residents to apply for these opportunities
- Our Youth and Connexions Service is working hard to help young people into work
- We have maintained a careers guidance service in every school
- We supported over 450 of the most vulnerable Year 11 pupils to make a transition into further education
- We re-engaged over 400 16-18 year olds through the New Start project
- Our 14-19 Partnership has increased the range of further education opportunities available locally
- We doubled the number of Apprenticeship opportunities in 2010

Summary of supplementary question: Can the Cabinet Member say more about what activities are being undertaken by the Council to deal with the problem of youth unemployment and the working together agenda?

Summary of Cabinet Member's reply: Thank you for your supplementary question. Last week I met with a range of organisations working in the field to identify how best we can work together to improve provision. I am happy to discuss this matter further with the Councillor and examine all possible options.

8.2 Question from Councillor Tim Archer

"As previously stated, Parliament completed the process by March 31st to introduce a revised code of practice which will prevent local authorities from wasting taxpayers money on vanity newspapers such as East End Life. Therefore why is the Mayor persisting with his money wasting consultation exercise regarding East End Life?"

Response (by Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Deputy Mayor)

We have reviewed the revised *Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity*. It lays down seven different principles. Conducting a review of East End Life is entirely consistent with the Code.

The suggestion that we are wasting money on this consultation is completely baseless. The review used officer time only. It was prepared from information that we already obtained from the budget setting process. There were no additional costs.

The Audit Commission's research also confirmed that local authorities were not wasting money on council publications. The Chief Executive of the Audit Commission said and I quote,

"The money being spent by councils is not unreasonable"

Tory councillors were proposing to get rid of East End Life. We would have had to spend £1.5m in advertising costs instead of £370,000 net cost to produce East End Life. This amounts to over £1m worth of waste.

It is the Tory councillors who have money wasting policies. The Mayor is working hard to get rid of waste.

This evening, we have already heard from residents that East End Life is a valuable community asset. We are happy to continue to support it. And we await the outcome of the review.

Summary of supplementary question: You have already promised cost savings of £200k p.a. from East End Life. How will these savings be delivered?

Summary of Cabinet Member's reply: Thank you for your supplementary question. I am able to report that following the budget process, opportunities for delivering savings have been identified. I am happy to discuss this matter further with the Councillor outside of this meeting.

8.3 Question from Councillor David Edgar

"Could the Mayor report on the action he has taken to engage with local GPs and the Primary Care Trust on the transfer of health commissioning to GPs, with the PCT on the transfer of public health responsibilities to the Council, and with the PCT on the future of community health services in the borough?"

Response (by Mayor Lutfur Rahman)

I met with Alastair Camp, the Chair of NHS Tower Hamlets and covered a number of the issues facing health services for Tower Hamlets. Since then, senior council officers, including the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director, Adults, Health and Wellbeing, have met with GPs and have been

working very closely with NHS Tower Hamlets to ensure that health changes are managed effectively for Tower Hamlets.

Transfer of health commissioning to GPs: The elections for the Tower Hamlets GP Consortium have taken place and the first Tower Hamlets Consortium Board was held on 5th April 2011. The Council is represented at this forum.

Transfer of Public Health responsibilities: The Co-Directors of Public Health and Corporate Director of Adults Health and Wellbeing meet on a regular basis to effectively manage the transition planning. The Council is hosting a Members' seminar on the health reforms on 20th April - please go along if you would like to find out more.

Future of community health services in the borough: Barts and The London were selected for the future host of Community Health Services. We were represented on the panel that evaluated their bid. And we have been involved in the oversight of the transition of the Community Health Services. Implementation is expected from 1st July 2011.

Summary of supplementary question: Health services have a national and a local dimension. Can the Mayor give his assurance that he will give priority to ensuring local accountability of the new bodies referred to in his response?

Summary of Mayor's reply: Thank you for your supplementary question. In recognition of the importance of this area I am currently overseeing the health portfolio personally. As already outlined we are centrally involved in a range of work to oversee the transition of health services locally.

8.4 Question from Councillor Fozol Miah

"Would the Mayor agree that there is a delicate balancing act between encouraging the vibrant atmosphere around Brick Lane and the scourge of anti-social behaviour afflicting both residents and visitors alike, and would he undertake an urgent investigation into the scale of the problem of anti-social behaviour and the measures that might be taken to address it?"

Response (by Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Deputy Mayor)

We are seeking to encourage an environment in which visitors can enjoy the cultural and social interests Brick Lane has to offer. At the same time, we are working in partnership with the Police and the community to respond to local concerns.

We have invested in a dedicated Police Town Centre team. They are supported by Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOs). THEOs patrol the town centre to ensure a visible presence.

THEOs have conducted enforcement activity in and around Brick Lane. In the past year, they issued 162 verbal warnings for anti-social behaviour. There

were 21 arrests as a result of THEO intervention related to anti-social behaviour.

I also visited Brick Lane with THEOs on two occasions.

The Labour Group Leadership and the Tories wanted to get rid of THEOs. Obviously, they don't want anti-social behaviour to be addressed in Brick Lane. Unlike them, we take residents' concerns very seriously.

We recently launched Brick Lane as the Olympics Curry Capital. More people will visit Brick Lane next year. We are reviewing and developing operational tactics to respond effectively to impact on the local community.

No supplementary question was asked.

8.5 Question from Councillor Amy Whitelock

"What assessment has the Mayor made of the impact that the Government's raft of welfare benefits changes, coming into force between 2011 and 2014 will have on Tower Hamlets residents?"

Response (by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member, Housing)

Last Wednesday, a total of 44 tax and benefit changes were introduced by the Coalition Government. It was described by some as Black Wednesday. Changes hit the most disadvantaged people in our community.

Changes to Local Housing Allowance on residents will mean a shortfall of £4.1 million. It is estimated that over 3,000 households within Tower Hamlets will be affected by the changes. There will be increases in non dependant deductions. These increases will affect over 8000 households.

Boris Johnson has condemned the housing benefit changes as an attempt by the government at 'social cleansing'. People on low income will get pushed out of affluent boroughs. This will add pressure on housing in boroughs like Tower Hamlets.

The Government has put in no support to help our disabled residents find work who will face regular assessments to prove their disability. The Tory-led Government's approach is nothing but appalling.

We passed a progressive budget last month saving jobs and frontline services. But, this Coalition government is intent on tearing our community apart by imposing cuts. And taking away benefits from people at a time of job losses and financial uncertainty.

Procedural motion

At this point Councillor Rabina Khan moved, and Councillor Alibor Choudhury seconded, "that under Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied to enable motion 12.6 regarding Housing Benefit changes to be considered as the next item."

The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **defeated**.

Summary of supplementary question: You have focussed mainly on the Housing Benefit changes. Can you confirm that the Executive have taken into account all aspects of the forthcoming changes to the welfare benefit system and identified actions that can be undertaken to assist local residents, including for example changes to Child Benefit and Disability Living Allowance; and does the Mayor agree that it is a disgrace that deprived boroughs are bearing the brunt of the cuts while bankers are still receiving bonuses?

Summary of Cabinet Member's reply: Thank you for your supplementary question. We have assessed and recognise the negative impact that the proposed changes will have on our local community and we are working to develop services in response. A Members' seminar will be arranged to ensure that Members are fully aware of the issues involved. I urge Members to attend this seminar and I reiterate the unfairness of the changes to the welfare benefits system.

8.6 Question from Councillor Peter Golds

"Further to the Council Motion passed over two months ago regarding the Thames Water Tunnel, can the Mayor confirm that the support for the Thames Tunnel as proposed by Thames Water and agreed by his Cabinet in December 2010 has been withdrawn? Also, when will the Mayor be meeting with Thames Water to discuss alternative routes?"

Response (by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member, Resources)

The latest position is that:

- The Mayor and I met the Chief Executive of Thames Water on 28th March
- The Mayor expressed his concern and disapproval of the proposal to construct a connection to the Thames Tideway Tunnel in King Edward Memorial Park or the adjacent fore shore.
- He presented the motion passed by Council on 2nd February to the Chief Executive Officer
- We stressed the need for Thames Water to rethink their proposals and to produce a reconfigured scheme which does not damage King Edward Memorial Park.
- Thames Water have agreed to further review their proposals.

Cabinet decision:

- The Cabinet report of 1st December was the draft technical response to the September/December consultation.
- Cabinet agreed the report which confirmed the need to reduce sewage overflowing into the Thames from Relief Sewers including the North East Storm Relief and Holloway Storm Relief sewers in the borough.
- The response conditionally confirmed that a tunnel following the Project's preferred Abbey Mill route was the most appropriate solution.
- The response warned that using King Edward Memorial Park (KEMP) as a main or intermediate tunnelling site would have substantial community and environmental impacts and strongly advised against reinstating KEMP as a preferred site.
- It acknowledged some work needs to be carried out in close proximity to the existing North East Storm Relief
- It recognised the fore shore site as least worst option put forward by Thames Water.

Mayor of London's stance:

- Boris has shown no support to residents' concern about the use of KEMP
- His office has refused to think of alternative sites away from KEMP
- While our Mayor has asked Thames Water to go back to the drawing board, Boris is happy to give them his full backing.
- Cllr Golds should focus on lobbying Boris to change his mind rather than jumping on the bandwagon now.

Summary of supplementary question: Is it not the case that the previous decision reached by the Mayor and Cabinet actually supported the use of the foreshore at King Edward Memorial Park for the accommodation of works associated with the Thames Tunnel?

Summary of Cabinet Member's reply: Thank you for your supplementary question. The Cabinet considered a draft technical response. I confirm that a further report will be presented to a future meeting of the Cabinet in relation to this matter. Additionally, it is proposed that an independent expert engineer will be appointed to examine possible alternative options. I ensure you that we are embedded in the campaign to urge Thames Water to think again on this scheme.

8.7 Question from Councillor Bill Turner

"Can the Mayor tell me how he plans to reduce council expenditure on consultants and agency staff?"

Response (by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member, Resources)

- The Council has reduced the annual costs of temporary staff by approximately £4.5 million per annum over the last 18 months.
- Over the last few months, the Council reduced its use of agency workers.
- A significant number of vacancies have been deleted as part of the Council's Lean programme.
- The Council is also taking a robust approach to redeployment and seeking to avoid compulsory redundancies – this reduces reliance on agency staff.
- The Council spends on average less than half of one percent of its revenue budget on Consultants.
- Most consultancy expenditure is incurred on major projects, such as the Building Schools for the Future programme
- Consultancies are used when specialist skills are required for a time limited nature where it would not represent value for money for staff to be employed by the Council.
- Use of Consultants is regularly reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This was most recently done in October last year. The Committee raised no concerns about the Council's strategy and engagement of consultants.

Summary of supplementary question: I would request details of what specialist skills are required in relation to the appointment of a number of consultants/agency staff in the Office of the Mayor?

Summary of Cabinet Member's reply: Thank you for your supplementary question. Members will recognise that there may be a need for additional specialist assistance in a range of areas such as housing, employment and social services, to ensure that the best possible advice is available to the Cabinet Members at all times.

Procedural motion – Referral to the Audit Committee

At this point Councillor Rachael Saunders moved, and Councillor Bill Turner seconded, "that under Rule 14.1.4 the matters raised in Councillor Turner's question above and the Cabinet Member's response be referred to the Audit Committee for consideration."

The motion was put to the vote and was **agreed.** Accordingly it was:-

RESOLVED

That the matters raised in Councillor Turner's question above and the Cabinet Member's response be referred to the Audit Committee for consideration.

8.8 Question from Councillor Harun Miah

"Would the Mayor agree with me that there remains an acute shortage of homes in this borough for larger families, that urgent action needs to be taken to alleviate the scourge of overcrowding and that this could be achieved through buying back certain kinds of top floor flats which would allow dormer extensions to be built?"

Response (by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member, Housing)

Reducing overcrowding and increasing housing supply is one of Mayor's top priorities. When he was leader and now as Mayor, Tower Hamlets produced the highest number of affordable and family sized socially rented units in England during 2009/10. We are continuing this work.

The Council has recently reviewed its approach to deconversions and extensions with Tower Hamlets Homes. Where feasible, we will consider allowing dormer extensions to top floor flats to ease overcrowding and create larger units.
In addition, the Mayor will investigate new opportunities to knock through existing properties.

- We will continue with the Cash Incentive Scheme to encourage over occupiers to move to smaller accommodation

- We will continue to work in partnership with RSLs, both to increase the number of affordable homes being built and to ensure that as many new homes as possible are family-sized homes.

- Where possible we will buy back ex-council 3 bed plus Right-to-Buy properties.

Furthermore the Council's Empty Property Policy Framework for private sector properties is in place and seeks to maximise the provision of new homes in a number of ways. This includes:

- The re-use of existing empty dwellings.
- The re-use, conversion or adaptation of empty living space over shops.
- The conversion and adaptation of appropriate redundant commercial buildings.

No supplementary question was asked.

8.9 Question from Councillor Carlo Gibbs

"Can the Mayor update me on how successful the Council has been on tackling benefit fraud in the Borough?"

Response (by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member, Resources)

So far in 2010/2011, the Benefit Fraud Investigation Team have achieved:

- 27 Convictions for Benefit Fraud
- 64 Administration Penalties for Benefit Fraud
- 56 Cautions issued for Benefit Fraud

The Tories talk a lot about benefit dependency culture. Yet, tax evasion costs the public purse over £15bn a year, as opposed to just over £1bn in benefit fraud. We don't hear the Government cracking down on tax evaders!

Research by Citizens Advice showed:
- up to half a million households entitled to Housing Benefit do not claim it
- up to 3 million households are missing out on Council Tax Benefit and
- as many as 1.7 million pensioners are missing out on Pension Credit they could be claiming.

No doubt it is politically useful for the Tories to play up fraud. But, why are they so quiet about unclaimed benefit entitlements?

When people are seeing cuts to their working hours or losing their jobs altogether, it is vital that those genuinely in need get the help they need, and quickly.

This Government is obviously more interested in cutting jobs than providing any real support to people in need.

Complexity in the benefit system means that about £2.2bn is lost each year – this is twice as much as is lost to fraud. We ask the Government what they are doing to address that!

Summary of supplementary question: Is the Cabinet Member aware of the benefits of the Council-run and DCLG-funded scheme to identify the illegal sub-letting of properties and reclaim those properties; and will he give a commitment that the scheme will continue as it is a vital tool in tackling housing fraud?

Summary of Cabinet Member's reply: Thank you for your supplementary question. I confirm that the scheme will continue.

8.10 Question from Councillor Emma Jones

"Given the Council's health scrutiny review of access to GPs and dentists, how many residents of the borough are still not registered with a dentist?"

Response (by Mayor Lutfur Rahman)

The most appropriate measure of access used by the Department of Health is - the percentage of adult population who have had an appointment with an NHS dentist in the last 24 months. The figure for Tower Hamlets is 46.9% - this is the most up to date figure available and it is from the end of February 2011.

We are continuing to improve on this figure. Improving dental access is a priority and it is shown as such in the NHS' Commissioning Strategy Plan for 2011-14.

[Note: The above response was given on the basis of information available at the time. Since the meeting the detailed figures have been confirmed as follows:- As at 31st December 2010, 46.9% of the adult population had had an appointment with an NHS dentist within the last 24 months. The March 2011 quarter figures are not yet available but our local figure for the end of February 2011 was 47.25%.]

Summary of supplementary question: The scrutiny review recommended a range of measures to improve accessibility to GPs and dentists. Can the Mayor comment on progress in relation to the actions taken?

Summary of Mayor's reply: Thank you for your supplementary question. I congratulate the Health Scrutiny Panel on their work and the challenge session confirmed that progress has been made. I will provide the Councillor with a detailed update outside of this meeting.

In accordance with Rule 12.10 (expiry of the time limit), questions 8.11 to 8.19 were not put at the meeting. Written responses would be forwarded to the questioners.

9. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

There was no business under this agenda item.

10. TO RECEIVE REPORTS AND QUESTIONS ON JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS (IF ANY)

There was no business under this agenda item.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

11.1 Members' Allowances Scheme 2011/12

RESOLVED

1. That the Members' Allowances Scheme at Part 6 of the Constitution be re-adopted for 2011/12, subject to the Mayor's Allowance and Basic Allowance being frozen at the current rate and the Special Responsibility Allowances being reduced by 5% as agreed at the Council's Budget meeting; and

2. That accordingly the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Members' Allowances Scheme 2011 be adopted as at Appendix 'A' of the report.

11.2 Calendar of Meetings 2011/12

RESOLVED

That the proposed calendar of meetings for the municipal year 2011/12 as set out at Appendix A of the report, be approved.

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

12.1 Motion proposed by Councillor Helal Abbas regarding Mr John Onslow

Councillor Helal Abbas moved, and Councillor Joshua Peck seconded, the motion as printed in the agenda.

Councillor Peck stated that the intention of the motion was not to change the street name 'Gladstone Place' but to rename the Council building colloquially known by that name as 'John Onslow House'. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.8.1 he and Councillor Abbas varied the wording of their motion to clarify this.

Councillor David Snowdon moved, and Councillor Peter Golds seconded, a tabled amendment to the motion as follows:-

"After 'This Council notes that', insert:

'1. The long-standing service to the Council, its employees and the residents of this Borough of GMB steward, John Onslow, who died in 2008.

2. The Bow Ideas Store at Gladstone Place was originally built as the Passmore Edwards Public Library of Bow, after the great eponymous philanthropist.'

After 'This Council resolves', delete all and insert:

'1. That the Civic Awards ad hoc Committee be tasked with preparing a report for Council recommending whether to rename any Council-owned buildings posthumously after local notables.

2. That the Civic Awards ad hoc Committee consider whether any buildings can be renamed sympathetically, in keeping with the history of the Borough and in a cost effective fashion.

3. That the Civic Awards ad hoc Committee consider any recommendations from Members or members of the public for buildings to rename and persons to be so honoured posthumously.

4. That the Civic Awards ad hoc Committee consider John Onslow, Reg Ward, Jimmy Lemkin, former Councillor Bill Kilgour, former Councillor Ted Johns, former Bethnal Green MP Mancherjee Bhownaggree (the first BME person ever elected in modern day Tower Hamlets), former Whitechapel and St Georges MP Walter "Stoker" Edwards'."

Subject to two variations to the wording (removal of 'delete all and' in line 8 and deletion of 'John Onslow' in line 19) which were agreed by Councillors Snowdon and Golds, the above amendment was accepted by Councillors Abbas and Peck, who varied their substantive motion accordingly.

Councillor Rabina Khan then moved, and Councillor Rania Khan seconded, a further tabled amendment to the motion as follows:-

"Replace 'This Council resolves

- To mark John's commitment to Tower Hamlets by renaming Gladstone Place 'John Onslow Place'

With

'This Council resolves

- To mark John Onslow's commitment by naming a newly created street after him'."

After debate this amendment was put to the vote and was **defeated**.

Councillor Tim Archer suggested that if the substantive motion was agreed, the arrangements set out therein for consideration of matters relating to the naming of Council buildings should apply immediately but that the Constitution Working Party should be asked to look at how best to deal with the issue in the longer term.

After further debate the substantive motion as amended was then put to the vote and was **agreed.** Accordingly it was:-

RESOLVED

This Council notes that

- The long-standing service to the Council, its employees and the residents of this borough of GMB steward, John Onslow, who died in 2008.

- The Bow Ideas Store at Gladstone Place was originally built as the Passmore Edwards Public Library of Bow, after the great eponymous philanthropist.

This Council resolves

- To mark John's commitment to Tower Hamlets by renaming the Council building known as Gladstone Place 'John Onslow House'.

- That the Civic Awards ad hoc Committee be tasked with preparing a report for Council recommending whether to rename any Council-owned buildings posthumously after local notables.

- That the Civic Awards ad hoc Committee consider whether any buildings can be renamed sympathetically, in keeping with the history of the Borough and in a cost effective fashion.

- That the Civic Awards ad hoc Committee consider any recommendation from Members or members of the public for buildings to rename and persons to be so honoured posthumously.

- That the Civic Awards ad hoc Committee consider Reg Ward, Jimmy Lemkin, former Councillor Bill Kilgour, former Councillor Ted Johns, former Bethnal Green MP Mancherjee Bhownaggree (the first BME person ever elected in modern day Tower Hamlets), former Whitechapel and St Georges MP Walter "Stoker" Edwards.

12.4 Motion proposed by Councillor Fozol Miah regarding the living wage and private contractors

Councillor Fozol Miah moved, and Councillor Harun Miah seconded, the motion as printed in the agenda.

Councillor Alibor Choudhury moved, and Councillor Oliur Rahman seconded, a tabled amendment as follows:-

"Add the following words 'as far as legally practicable' after 'This Council urges the Mayor'.

This amendment was accepted by Councillors Fozol Miah and Harun Miah, who varied their substantive motion accordingly.

The substantive motion as amended was then put to the vote and was **agreed** with no Member voting against. Accordingly it was:-

RESOLVED

This Council notes that

1) this Council has a policy of paying at least a "living wage" to its employees

2) the decision to become a "living wage" council, following the campaign by Telco and others, was a great step forward for the low paid in this borough

3) a number of companies which the council contracts to supply services in this borough do not pay a living wage to their low paid employees

This Council urges the Mayor as far as legally practicable:

1) To carry out an investigation of all companies which the council currently has contracts with to determine whether they pay at least the living wage to their employees

2) To investigate the legal means to force companies to pay the living wage where they are not doing so under threat of losing their contracts if they fail to do so

3) To investigate ensuring that the awarding of future contracts is confined to companies that have a "living wage" policy

4) To lobby the Government to change the law where necessary to allow the council to make contractors comply with the "living wage" policy of this Council.

12.5 Motion proposed by Councillor Joshua Peck regarding the Local Government Pension Scheme

Councillor Joshua Peck moved, and Councillor Helal Abbas seconded, the motion as printed in the agenda.

Following debate, the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed** with no Member voting against. Accordingly it was:-

RESOLVED

This Council notes that

- The LGPS is a sustainable, good quality pension scheme that benefits from being funded and locally managed. It is valuable to employers and employees alike.
- Successive governments have failed to recognise the distinctiveness of the LGPS in setting policy, most notably in the proposal announced by the Chancellor in the last CSR to impose an extra 3.2% contribution tax on scheme members, increasing scheme average member contributions from 6.6% to 9.8%.
- This tax does not benefit the scheme or scheme members or employers.
- This proposal is in addition to pension reductions caused by being indexed against CPI instead of RPI and is in advance of recommendations now published by the Hutton Review.

This Council further notes:

- That an increase in member contributions as proposed will lead to mass opt outs from the LGPS and that would be undesirable and damaging. The views expressed by the LGA in its letter to the Chancellor dated 16 February 2011 on this subject are also the views of this Council.

This Council Resolves:

- To write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretary of State for Local Government within the next month stating this Council's support for LGA's position and calling for government to rethink its proposed increases to LGPS member contributions.
- To work with Trade Unions to ensure employees are made aware of the proposals for the LGPS and to encourage them to support the Council's representations to defend their pension scheme.

12.6 Motion proposed by Councillor Rabina Khan regarding Housing Benefit changes

Councillor Rabina Khan moved, and Councillor Alibor Choudhury seconded, the motion as printed in the agenda.

Following debate, the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed.** Accordingly it was:-

RESOLVED

This Council notes that

- On 1 April 2011 several of the Government's measures to reduce Housing Benefit came into effect.
- The first of these measures will increase the level of deductions made to housing benefit to households which are shared by non-dependant adults, such as adult children.
- The second of these measures will remove the increased rate of housing benefit for a 5 bedroom house, capping the maximum rate of housing benefit applicable for a 4 bedroom house.
- This Council has one of the worst overcrowding problems in London – there are 9,387 houses that are overcrowded
- The Council has a good track record of projects to reduce overcrowding in the borough

This Council believes that:

- These measures are a deliberate attempt at social engineering
- These measures will have an adverse and disproportionate effect on residents
- These measures will increase overcrowding in the borough
- Overcrowding is the cause of severe health problems and impacts negatively on the educational attainment of children.

This Council resolves:

- To lobby against the coalition government's policies which clearly have a discriminatory affect on residents
- To condemn these policies as discriminatory
- To offer support and guidance to families that are adversely affected due to these changes

Motions 12.2 and 12.3 had been considered earlier in the meeting.

Motions 12.7 and 12.8 were not considered due to the time limit for the meeting being reached.

The meeting ended at 10.30 p.m.

Chair,
Council