

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

DECISIONS OF THE COUNCIL

HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 22 JANUARY 2014

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

The meeting opened at 7.32 p.m.

NOTE - AGENDA ORDER

During the meeting the Council agreed to vary the order of business. To aid clarity, the Decision Sheet is presented in the order that the items originally appeared on the agenda. Urgent Motions, moved with the agreement of the Council without notice, are listed at Item 13.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Lutfa Begum, Ann Jackson, Anwar Khan and Fozol Miah. Apologies for lateness were received on behalf of Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

No declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests were made.

3. MINUTES

DECISION

That the unrestricted minutes of the Ordinary Council meeting held on 27 November 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and the Speaker be authorised to sign them accordingly.

(Action by: John S. Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services)

4. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE SPEAKER OF THE COUNCIL OR THE HEAD OR PAID SERVICE

Please see minutes.

5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

5.1 Petition regarding initiatives to create a sustainable environment

Mr Muhammad Haque addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. The relevant Cabinet Member then responded to the matters raised in the petition.

DECISION

That the petition be referred to the Service Head, Corporate Strategy and Equalities for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

(Action by: Louise Russell, Service Head, Corporate Strategy and Equalities)

5.2 Petition regarding leaseholder charges and services delivered by Tower Hamlets Homes

Ms Allison Charles addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. The relevant Cabinet Member then responded to the matters raised in the petition.

DECISION

That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Development and Renewal, for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

(Action by: Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director, Development and Renewal)

5.3 Petition regarding Anti-Social Behaviour at Anson House

Residents of Anson House addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. The relevant Cabinet Member then responded to the matters raised in the petition.

DECISION

That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Development and Renewal, for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

(Action by: Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director, Development and Renewal)

6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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

- 6.1 Question from Ms Julia Dockerill regarding Wapping Green.
- 6.2 Question from Mr Matthew Smith regarding Community Infrastructure Levy
- 6.3 Question from Mrs S Morrison regarding honouring the legacy of Nelson Mandela
- 6.4 Question from Mr Shah Ahmed regarding behaviour in Full Council meetings
- 6.5 Question from Ms Nasmin Sultana regarding Poplar Business Park
- 6.8 Question from Mr Kois Miah regarding the organisation "Student Rights"
- 6.9 Question from Mr Azmal Hussain regarding the Brick Lane Saturation Policy.

Question 6.6 was not put as the questioner was not present, a written response would be provided. Question 6.7 was withdrawn.

(Action by: John S. Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services – to arrange written responses)

7. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor made his report to the Council meeting. The Leader of the Majority Group and the Leader of each Minority Group then responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

8. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

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

- 8.1 Question from Councillor Denise Jones regarding stabbings in Wapping over the Christmas period.
- 8.2 Question from Councillor Peter Golds regarding the Mayor's statements on the 'March against alcohol'.

8.3 Question from Councillor Rachael Saunders regarding the Mayor's non-attendance at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings

8.5 Question from Councillor Joshua Peck regarding levels of dog fouling and street cleanliness in the Deputy Mayor's ward and the borough.

Question 8.4 was not put at the meeting as the questioner was not present. Questions 8.6 to 8.29 were not put due to a lack of time. Written responses would be provided to the questions.

(**Action by:** John S. Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services – to arrange written responses)

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

9.1 Watts Grove Depot

The Council considered a reference from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on its review of the Watts Grove Depot Mayoral Decision and related issues. An addendum report, including minor amendments to the Committee's findings as agreed at their meeting on 20th January, was tabled.

Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman **moved**, and Councillor Rachael Saunders **seconded**, the recommendations in the report as amended.

DECISION

1. That the Council notes the amendment agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th January to the first bullet point of item 2.0 of the Committee's report to read as follows:-
 - The decision to use the model selected for the Watts Grove Depot redevelopment was flawed, and vulnerable to potentially foreseeable changes. The consequence of these decisions has seen the council incur costs of approximately £308,000 (as of 5th November), and lose out on the opportunity to provide 149 affordable homes. A partnership with an RP, or another more economically viable alternative model, would have been a better option. However, to pursue this now would involve starting the full and costly process again from the beginning.
2. That subject to the above amendment, the Council endorse the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in the report; and that the Mayor and Cabinet Members be requested to act accordingly.

(**Action by:** Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director, Development and Renewal)

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

There was no business under this heading.

11. OTHER BUSINESS**11.1 Appointment of Members to the Health and Wellbeing Board**

The Council considered the report of the Service Head, Democratic Services on appointments to the Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Board.

During debate Councillor Denise Jones was nominated as the non-executive majority group councillor to serve on the Board.

DECISION

1. That the Council agree the appointment of co-opted members to the Tower Hamlets Wellbeing Board as set out at paragraph 1.3 of the circulated report.
2. That Councillor Denise Jones be appointed to serve as the non-executive majority group councillor on the Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Board.
3. That the Council note the other appointments to the Board which take effect by operation of statute.
4. That the above appointments shall be for the remainder of the current municipal year.

(Action by: Robert McCulloch-Graham, Corporate Director Education, Social Care and Wellbeing)

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**12.1 Motion regarding the Mayor's statements on the "March against alcohol"**

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

Following debate, the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council notes:

- The possibility of an increase in community tensions arising from the well-publicised “March against alcohol” in Brick Lane on December 13th.
- That Brick Lane is known worldwide for its vibrant restaurant offer, and that the beginning of the Christmas period is a highpoint for the local economy.

This Council believes:

- This event would intimidate restaurants and their customers, and attract other extremist groups to the area
- Policing the event was a waste of valuable police resources, with a reduction in the availability of officers across the borough at a particularly busy time.

This Council also notes:

- That the initial statement issued in the name of the Mayor was “We strongly believe in the right to free speech and association, and I am pleased that, with the Police’s support, this group were able to exercise that right whilst upholding respect for our communities, which is the hallmark of our ‘No Place for Hate’ pledge.”

This Council also believes:

- That this was an extraordinary response in view of the threats to legitimate local businesses and their customers who were intent on enjoying a pre-Christmas lunch completely within the law.

This Council further notes:

- That following hostile publicity after the release of this statement an amended statement was published, stating “As part of our pledge to ‘No Place for Hate’, we oppose all groups that seek to impose their views on and bring division to our communities. Council staff worked with the Police to ensure that the businesses, residents and visitors on Brick Lane were protected during the demonstration.”

This Council further believes:

- That the confusion around the Mayor’s position on this important issue shames the Council, reflecting poorly on his office.
- That there are a number of unanswered questions as to how the original inappropriate statement came to be released, including:-
 1. Why, with a multi-million pound publicity budget he makes such different statements?

2. Who authorised the initial statement in his name?
3. What particular event or events the following week encouraged him to change the statement?

This Council resolves:

- To condemn the Mayor's original statement, and the confusion around its subsequent retraction.
- To instruct officers to present a report to the next Council meeting, outlining the procedural failures that led to this debacle; and the steps to be taken to prevent a repeat.

(Action by: Stephen Halsey, Head of Paid Service/Takki Sulaiman, Service Head, Communications and Marketing)

12.3 Motion regarding Cost of Living

Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Sirajul Islam **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda.

Following debate, the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council believes:

- That families in Tower Hamlets are feeling the pinch, with prices rising faster than wages, and too many local people finding it difficult to access decent work.
- That the Conservative-led Government is complacent about the difficulties people are facing, as demonstrated by Ian Duncan Smith's refusal to even speak to representatives from the Trussell Trust who run many of the country's food banks.
- That it is shameful that people in the UK are dependent on food banks
- That Lutfur Rahman is weak and out of touch with the real needs of local people – whilst his administration has plenty of short term gimmicks, he has done little to tackle to real issues that local people face.

This Council notes:

- That despite much fanfare at launch, Tower Hamlets Power has so far only helped 237 residents with their electricity bills despite spending over £12,000 on publicity for the scheme and plans to spend a further £37,351 promoting it this month.

- That Lutfur Rahman's cuts to funding for already overstretched advice services have left many families with no access to support. Whilst other London boroughs such as Labour controlled Camden and Islington are increasing their funding for these kind of advice services in light of increasing demand.
- That CAB applied for funding from the events grants funds, but was refused yet the Mayor instead decided to fund events by commercial media organisations.
- That the weak, insular approach of the current administration means that opportunities to support local people in tough times are being missed.
- That most high streets in Tower Hamlets feature at least one pay day loan shop.
- That with a Mayor that refuses to answer questions in public, Tower Hamlets has little chance of being taken seriously by business or other local stakeholders.

This Council resolves:

- To support Ed Miliband's cost of living pledge, which sets out the real action a Labour government would take:
 1. Stop the Government's raid on pensioners and block its £40,000 tax cut to 14,000 millionaires
 2. End rail rip-offs by capping fares increases on every route
 3. Force the energy firms to cut gas and electricity bills for 4 million over-75s
 4. Stop excessive fees charged by banks and low cost airlines
 5. Defend working families from the raid on their tax credits by reversing the Government's pension tax break for those earning over £150,000
- To condemn Boris Johnson's rip off rises to fares on tubes and buses.
- To campaign for effective benefit take up advice for Tower Hamlets residents and to call upon the Council to use the communications tools at their disposal for the benefit of local people not the ludicrous self-promotion of the Mayor.

- To call on Lutfur Rahman to reconsider the grant funding that goes to his cronies, and to reinstate the previous levels of funding to our advice services.
- To call on the Council to provide logistical support to those organising food banks, including offering the use of Council buildings for collections.
- To condemn Lutfur Rahman for his failure to work with business to secure apprenticeships or work experience opportunities in the borough, or to secure Living Wage commitments for Tower Hamlets workers outside the Town Hall.

(**Action by:** Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director, Development and Renewal)

12.6 Motion regarding commercialisation of the Borough's public spaces

Councillor Joshua Peck **moved**, and Councillor Abdal Ullah **seconded**, the motion as printed on the agenda.

During debate, Councillor Peter Golds proposed a minor amendment to the motion, substituting 'Millwall Park' for 'Island Gardens' in the 3rd sub-point of bullet point 5 under 'This Council notes'. This was accepted by Councillors Joshua Peck and Abdal Ullah who altered their motion accordingly. Following further debate the substantive motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council notes:

- That Tower Hamlets is a densely populated borough where many people don't have their own gardens
- That an increasing number of Tower Hamlets residents live at or near the poverty line, with all of their disposable income going on housing, heating and food, leaving nothing left over for leisure or entertainment
- That many of our residents rely on free access to our parks, open spaces and community facilities for recreation, physical and mental health and community cohesion
- That parks and open spaces represent important public places for people of all communities to come together strengthening community cohesion and building One East End.
- That the current Mayor has been increasingly using the borough's parks, open spaces and community facilities to raise money, at the

expense of their intended purpose as a community asset and public service, including:

- Letting a four year contract to Lovebox for seven days of festivals each year in Victoria Park, despite significant complaints from residents about disturbance from events, huge damage to the Park and significant spikes in crime when Lovebox takes place each year;
 - allowing a cider company to run a pop-up bar in Victoria Park;
 - renting out Millwall Park for an Oktoberfest event;
 - changing the use of the Mile End Park Arts Pavilion from a community art gallery to a wedding and commercial events venue
 - and a proposal to allow parties on Trinity Square Gardens, adjacent to the war memorial, which attracted national condemnation.
- That whilst many residents accept the need for revenue-raising activities as council funding is severely cut by the Government, the nature and frequency of many of these commercial events is having a disproportionate effect on the ability of residents to use and enjoy them.
 - That the proportion of funding raised from these facilities that is reinvested in them is dropping dramatically – for example, falling from 73% of funding raised by Victoria Park in 2010 being reinvested in the Park and free events in it to just 29% in 2012.
 - That free events for residents put on by the Council – which also used to be paid for by these funds – is also reducing:
 - The popular Paradise Gardens was cancelled by the Mayor in 2012
 - The Victoria Park fireworks were cancelled by the Mayor in 2012, on the pretence that this was to allow three fireworks events to take place across the borough, but in 2013, only one event took place, and that the number of residents attending the fireworks has dropped from 80,000 in 2011 to just 16,000 in 2013

This Council believes:

- The primary and over-riding purpose of our public parks, open spaces and community facilities should be for the free and unfettered use of our residents
- Some commercial use of these facilities is acceptable as long as it is done in a way that does not unduly impact on users and local residents

This Council further notes:

- That on 16 May 2012 this Council resolved to amend the Open Spaces Strategy to put reasonable restrictions on the use of parks and open spaces for commercial events, in order to protect their primary purpose
- That as a result of the Council's process for resolution of disputes between the Council and the Executive, the Open Spaces Strategy was referred back to the Mayor for consideration and should have then been brought back to Council for a final decision, yet 19 months later, it still has not been considered by the Mayor and been brought back to Council.

This Council resolves:

- To restate its position that reasonable limits must be put on the use of open spaces and community facilities for commercial events
- To instruct the Head of Paid Service to report in writing to all Councillors as to why a revised Open Spaces Strategy, implementing the decision of Council on 16 May 2012 has not been put forward to the Mayor to consider and then brought to Council.

(Action by: Stephen Halsey, Head of Paid Service and Corporate Director, Communities, Localities and Culture)

12.8 Motion regarding Leasehold Service Charges

Councillor Marc Francis **moved**, and Councillor Carlo Gibbs **seconded**, the motion as printed in the agenda, incorporating a number of tabled amendments.

Councillor Ohid Ahmed **moved**, and Councillor Kabir Ahmed **seconded**, an amendment to the motion which was put to the vote and was **defeated**.

Following debate the substantive motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council notes:

- In 2008, Full Council agreed a motion authorising the Lead Member for Housing to commission an independent audit of leasehold service charges following concerns about the two-thirds increase in the level of Management & Administration fees, numerous historic disputes over the costs recharged and a Scrutiny Review which called for much greater transparency and accountability in the calculation of service charges;

- In 2009, a Project Steering Group (PSG) involving councillors, Tower Hamlets Homes (THH), Tower Hamlets Leaseholders Association (THLA) and other leaseholders agreed detailed Terms of Reference for that audit, commissioned Beevers & Struthers Ltd to carry it out;
- In spring 2010, THH attempted unilaterally to introduce new methodology for the calculation of management fees and a new policy to charge to ground floor leaseholders for services they did not benefit from, which was blocked by the Lead Member;
- In summer 2010 a draft version was produced for the PSG, identifying a series of very challenging issues for THH around the management of leasehold services, value for money, caretaking, repairs and maintenance, management and administration fees, and several Service Levels Agreements with LBTH;
- However, publication of the final audit report was delayed by the Mayoral Election in October 2010 and not finally signed off by the PSG until May 2011, by which time LBTH/THH had already begun consultation on a "Leasehold Policy Review" which was claimed to have been based on its findings;
- The Mayor and Lead Member subsequently established a Leasehold Action Plan Working Group (LAPWG), including representatives of leaseholders to bring together the Beevers & Struthers' recommendations, those of the Audit Commission and THH's own Leaseholder Service Improvement Group, and a Statement of Intent was agreed by all those involved to implement the 54 recommendations or agree an alternative remedy;
- Over the next 18 months, just five of the 54 recommendations were implemented and in October 2012, THH sent leaseholders "actuals", which included significantly increased charges in most areas, particularly block/estate cleaning, a 17 per cent "Overhead" fee and new SLAs with LBTH. They were told these costs had been calculated on the B&S audit and had actually been "dampened" and so would increase further over the next two years;
- In spring 2013, THH leaseholders published a damning scrutiny report, which exposed the failure to implement the recommendations in the original Beevers & Struthers audit;
- In response, the current Lead Member for Housing & Development, is now proposing an "review" of the implementation of the recommendations of the original B&S audit and the Mayor is commissioning an audit of latest "actuals" at a cost of around a further £15,000.

This Council believes:

- The Mayor and THH have not implemented the recommendations contained in the independent audit in accordance with the agreed Statement of Intent and that the original aim of increasing transparency and accountability has been lost;
- Leaseholders should be fully recharged for the costs of the services they receive, but that the 2011/12 “actuals” are not based on the methodology set out in the recommendations in the B&S audit, but are instead opaque and represent very poor value for money;

This Council resolves to call on the Mayor to:

- Explain why only 5 out of 54 of the recommendations arising from the B&S audit have so far been implemented;
- Explain why an 17 per cent “Overhead” has been introduced across most Heads of Charge;
- Justify the Service Level Agreements between LBTH and THH and explain what action is being taken to ensure best value;
- Instruct THH to publish a report detailing how the actions it has taken since October 2010 to achieve “savings” have resulted in reduced costs to council leaseholders and tenants.

(**Action by:** Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director, Development and Renewal)

12.10 Motion regarding Local Authorities Mental Health Challenge

Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs **moved**, and Councillor Rachel Saunders **seconded**, the motion as printed on the agenda.

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

RESOLVED

This Council notes:

- 1 in 6 people will experience a mental health problem in any given year.
- The World Health Organisation predicts that depression will be the second most common health condition worldwide by 2020.
- Mental ill health costs some £105 billion each year in England alone.

- People with a severe mental illness die up to 20 years younger than their peers in the UK.
- There is often a circular relationship between mental health and issues such as housing, overcrowding, employment, family problems or debt.
- The local Mental Health Strategy notes that “Tower Hamlets has amongst the highest levels of mental health need in England.”
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has recently investigated the links between mental health and housing, such as how the lettings system does not always appropriately assess and respond to mental health problems as a priority need.

This Council further notes:

- Despite signing up to the Time to Change pledge to tackle mental health discrimination, Executive Members continue to use stigmatizing mental health language in public meetings and press releases, which undermines the aims of Time to Change and perpetuates negative attitudes to those with mental health problems.

This Council believes:

- As a local authority we have a crucial role to play in improving the mental health of everyone in our community and tackling some of the widest and most entrenched inequalities in health.
- Mental health should be a priority across all the local authority’s functions, from public health, adult social care and children’s services to housing, planning and public realm.
- All Councillors, whether members of the Executive or Scrutiny and in our community and casework roles, can play a positive role in championing mental health on an individual and strategic basis. This includes never using negative mental health language for political purposes, particularly directed as an insult.

This Council resolves:

To sign the Local Authorities’ Mental Health Challenge run by Centre for Mental Health, Mental Health Foundation, Mind, Rethink Mental Illness, Royal College of Psychiatrists and YoungMinds.

We commit to:

1. Appoint an elected member as ‘mental health champion’ across the Council – this would be a Full Council appointee

2. Identify a 'lead officer' for mental health to link in with colleagues across the Council
3. Follow the implementation framework for the mental health strategy where it is relevant to the Council's work and local needs
4. Work to reduce inequalities in mental health in our community
5. Work with the NHS to integrate health and social care support
6. Promote wellbeing and initiate and support action on public mental health
7. Tackle discrimination on the grounds of mental health in our community
8. Encourage positive mental health in our schools, colleges and workplaces
9. Proactively engage and listen to people of all ages and backgrounds about what they need for better mental health
10. Restate the commitment to the Time to Change pledge and pledge to never use stigmatizing mental health language for political purposes
11. Introduce mental health awareness training for all elected members and promote the local authority challenge guide, to ensure we can support our constituents.
12. Introduce training for frontline staff, such as housing and lettings teams, so they can identify and support people with mental health needs appropriately.

(**Action by:** Robert McCulloch-Graham, Corporate Director, Education, Social Care and Wellbeing)

12.11 Motion on Nelson Mandela

Councillor Rabina Khan **moved**, and Councillor Rania Khan **seconded**, the motion as printed in the agenda.

Councillor David Snowdon **moved**, and Councillor Peter Golds **seconded**, an amendment to the motion which was put to the vote and was **defeated**.

Councillor Carlo Gibbs **moved**, and Councillor Sirajul Islam **seconded**, an amendment to the motion which was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

Following debate the substantive motion as amended was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

The Council notes:

- On the 5th December 2013, South African anti-apartheid revolutionary Nelson Mandela passed away.
- Mandela served 27 years in prison after being convicted of attempting to overthrow the state while an international campaign lobbied for his release.
- After his release, Mandela joined negotiations with President FW de Klerk to abolish apartheid and establish multiracial elections, lead the ANC into victory where he became South Africa's first black president and won the Nobel Prize for Peace.

The Council believes:

- Despite Margaret Thatcher describing Nelson Mandela as a 'terrorist', and the refusal of the Tory government at the time to unite with the rest of Europe in imposing sanctions on South Africa, Nelson Mandela died perceived universally as a courage and principled politician whose example in resisting oppression and inequality inspires all those struggling for racial equality and social justice.
- In a borough where so many different races live side by side, Mandela's determination to create racial equality and unite the black and white people of South Africa holds a particular importance.

The Council resolves:

- To remember Nelson Mandela, in particular, to use every relevant occasion to remind the young of the borough of the importance of both fighting for their beliefs and reconciliation.
- To call on the Mayor to allocate a budget from the recently increased Community Events Fund to run an educational project for the borough's schools in Black History month later this year, focused on Nelson Mandela's legacy.
- To instruct officers to draw up options for a permanent tribute to Nelson Mandela in the borough and to present these to full Council in advance of Black History month.

- To call on the Mayor of London and LLDC to name a street in the new Olympic park after Nelson Mandela in recognition of sports power to unite communities.

(**Action by:** Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director, Development and Renewal/
Louise Russell, Service Head, Corporate Strategy and Equality)

12.12 Motion regarding Protecting Community Pubs

Councillor Denise Jones **moved**, and Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs **seconded**, the motion as printed on the agenda.

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

RESOLVED

This Council notes:

- That in addition to the provision of its own services the Council should support through its policies and the exercise of its powers a network of well-run community facilities, including shops, pubs, advice centres, places of worship and other local forums and services which are valued by residents. As an example of these, community pubs provide a valuable community service for those who choose to use them.
- Twenty-six pubs close every week across the country. In Tower Hamlets many pubs have already been converted to flats or stand empty.
- Recently local pubs such as The Sun in Bethnal Green and the Britannia pub in Mile End have closed down, to the disappointment of local residents.
- Pubs inject an average of £80,000 into their local economy each year and support almost one million UK jobs, 46% of whom are 16 – 24 year olds.
- That whilst some pubs can have anti-social behaviour problems which the Council should challenge, the majority offer a positive contribution to our borough and are part of a balanced and inclusive community offering that helps to define the local quality of life.

This Council further notes:

- The recently adopted Managing Development Document policy DM8 specifies that social and community facilities, such as public houses, will be protected where they meet an identified local need and the buildings are suitable for their use.

- That while conversion of pubs to residential use would be resisted as contrary to planning policy, this does not automatically mean such applications would be rejected.
- Residents often feel they have no opportunity to prevent their local pubs from being sold off or converted to flats.
- The demolition of pubs is classed as “permitted development” means planning permission is not required. Between 2003 and 2012, 414 former pubs were demolished in London alone.

This Council believes:

- Local pubs are a hugely important community hub, bringing local people together and providing social inclusion opportunities.
- While pubs that cause antisocial behaviour should be subject to enforcement action, well managed community pubs should be protected by the council.

This Council resolves:

- To work with residents to list local pubs as Assets of Community Value under the Localism Act, giving greater protection against pubs being sold off to developers
- To support the Sustainable Communities Act proposal: “That the Secretary of State help protect community pubs in England by ensuring that planning permission and community consultation are required before community pubs are allowed to be converted to betting shops, supermarkets and pay-day loan stores or other uses, or are allowed to be demolished.”
- To work together with Local Works and the Campaign for Real Ale to gain support for the proposal from other councils in the region and across the country.

(Action by: Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director, Development and Renewal)

Motions 12.2, 12.4, 12.5, 12.7, 12.9, 12.13 and 12.14 were not debated due to lack of time.

13. URGENT MOTIONS

The Council agreed to suspend Procedure Rule 13.1 to enable the following urgent motions to be debated without notice:

13.1 Urgent motion calling for an investigation into Old Poplar Town Hall

Councillor Peter Golds **moved**, and Councillor Tim Archer **seconded**, the motion as tabled.

Following debate the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council notes:

- The former Poplar Town Hall on the corner of Poplar High Street and Woodstock Terrace, E14 is an iconic building dating back to the 19th Century. It was the administrative home of Poplar Borough Council 1900-1938, and as such is a listed building.
- That in 2008 the former Poplar Town Hall was put up for disposal and the Cabinet stipulated that “it should be advertised locally to allow local groups to make an offer”
- That subsequently on 12 January 2011 officers were given authority to dispose of the property in the open market.
- That according to answers provided by the council, the property was “openly and widely” marketed by external agents on 9 May 2011; and a wide range of bids was received on 8 July 2011.
- The property was, according to officers, sold to the highest bidder. The transaction was completed on 11 November 2011. The sum paid by the highest bidder was £876,000
- That this price was not much more than the price of a family home nearby, for example on 6 May 2011 a three bedroom semi-detached house close by in Woodstock Terrace was sold for £585,000
- That the former Poplar Town Hall contains offices, a full size council chamber, and even a self-contained flat, and is obviously substantially larger than a three bedroom semi-detached house.

This Council further notes:

- That the owners of the successful bidder and ultimate purchaser, Dreamstar, are well known to the Mayor and members of his administration.
- That planning permission and Listed Building Consent were granted on the 3rd July 2013 for a change of use from office (B1) to hotel (C1) under Officers’ delegated authority.

- That the change of use from office to hotel use will result in an increase in value of the building by several million pounds.

This Council believes:

- That it is entirely inappropriate to grant this change of use using delegated power, considering the public interest in the sale of the building and the effect such a change of use would have on local residents.
- That there remain unanswered questions as to the relationship between the current owner/occupier, and the administration.
- That no answer has been given as to whether in the initial marketing documents bidders were informed that the council would entertain a change of use of this type.

This Council resolves:

- To instruct the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer, in conjunction with the District Auditor, to undertake an immediate investigation into the marketing and sale of the former Poplar Town Hall
- That this investigation should include details of all meetings and correspondence between officers of the council, councillors, the Mayor, bidders, and those responsible for publicising the sale; and that these details should be published.
- The investigation should pay particular attention to any potential conflicts of interest, etc not properly disclosed.
- That the investigation should appoint an independent property valuer to establish the 2011 valuation of the building with B1 office use and C1 Hotel use, and the 2014 valuation of the building with C1 Hotel use.
- That the investigation should, in view of the seriousness of this situation, produce a report to be considered by O&S on March 4th and the full Council at their meeting on March 26th.

(Action by: Stephen Halsey, Head of Paid Service; Chris Holme, Interim Corporate Director, Resources; Meic Sullivan-Gould, Monitoring Officer)

13.2 Urgent motion on the integrity of upcoming elections

Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Helal Abbas **seconded**, the motion as tabled.

Following debate the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council notes that:

- Following recent updates from the Head of Paid Service this motion seeks to amend the scope of the investigations launched at the last Council meeting.
- Two weeks ago the Electoral Commission identified Tower Hamlets as one of 16 boroughs at greater risk of electoral fraud in the 2014 local and mayoral elections.
- This week the Council will launch a new candidate protocol to help reassure voters that the upcoming elections will be free, fair and without fraud.
- At the Council's November meeting a motion was passed which raised serious questions about the conduct of the Mayor's re-election campaign.
- Thus far our understanding is that the ongoing Council investigation has no reason to doubt the account given on the LoveWapping Blog.
- A THH investigation launched following this incident, but prior to the Council motion, found no evidence to suggest that they actually were THH staff.
- The police are looking into the allegations and have yet to draw a final conclusion.
- It is possible to assume that these women were impersonating THH Officers in order to convince residents to divulge information they wouldn't have given to political campaigners.

We further note that:

- Despite their efforts Council officers have been unable to identify these canvassers.
- Subsequent to the canvassing Mr Baines received Members Enquiry acknowledgements and then responses from the Mayor.
- This means that the information from the canvassers was passed to the Mayor's office for processing, and that therefore a record will exist in the Mayor's office.
- This also means that the Mayor's office will have knowledge of how it received this information and will be able to help identify the canvassers or will know persons who can identify them.

This Council believes that:

- Ongoing attempts by the Council to prevent electoral fraud at the upcoming elections will be undermined by the perception that legitimate concerns have been raised and ignored by the current Mayor who has refused to answer the serious questions put to him.
- In the absence of any sign that the Mayor intends to come clean about the conduct of his re-election campaign, it is incumbent upon Council officers to continue to investigate all allegations raised and to take all steps possible to identify the three women who falsely claimed to be members of THH staff. This includes investigating the conduct of officers in the Mayor's office, and the use of resources in the Mayor's Office.

This Council further notes:

- During the debate at the last Council meeting the Mayor was directly asked a number of questions which he refused consistently to answer:
 - Does the Mayor's re-election campaign pay people who canvass for him? If so, How is this funded?
 - Is the Mayor aware of people going round with his leaflets pretending to be from Tower Hamlets Homes? Has he investigated? Does he believe this may be a case of fraud?
 - Clearly the Mayor's campaign has already cost thousands of pounds so why has the Mayor only ever made one donation declaration to the Electoral Commission? How does he fund his campaign?
 - Why did the Mayor and independent councillors ban acknowledgement letters to save money and then send 4,322 of them at tax payer expense? Will they pay the money back?
 - Is there any link between the Mayor's funding to many new organisations in the borough and the Mayor's campaign?
 - Why is the Mayor remaining silent and refusing to answer these serious allegations from residents?

This Council further believes:

- The integrity of the upcoming elections is at risk if the Mayor continues to refuse to answer these important questions.
- That the lack of declarations to the Electoral Commission is incredibly concerning given that the Mayor has hosted a number of high profile events including:

- A dinner at Mulberry School for over 2,000 women at Mulberry School
- An Iftar meal for well over 1,000 people at WaterLily in August
- A fundraising dinner at Canary Wharf
- Numerous glossy printed leaflets distributed across the borough

This Council resolves:

- To further instruct officers to continue their investigation, with an expanded mandate to include attempts to identify the people potentially of impersonating Council or THH staff and to take appropriate action including referral to the police on the basis of false representation.
- Call on the Mayor and any independent councillors with any information, to identify the three canvassers who are at the centre of these allegations.
- To suspend standing orders to allocate a five minute slot after this item for the Mayor, and no other member, to personally address the questions set out above in the further notes section, and following that the proposer of this motion should then have a two minute right of reply.

(Action by: Stephen Halsey, Head of Paid Service/Andy Bamber, Service Head, Community Safety)

The meeting ended at 11.02 p.m.