LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2014

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

Members Present:

Mayor Lutfur Rahman
Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed
Councillor Rajib Ahmed
Councillor Suluk Ahmed
Councillor Mahbub Alam
Councillor Shah Alam
Councillor Amina Ali
Councillor Shahed Ali
Councillor Abdul Asad
Councillor Craig Aston
Councillor Asma Begum
Councillor Rachel Blake
Councillor Chris Chapman
Councillor Dave Chesterton
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury
Councillor Alibor Choudhury
Councillor Julia Dockerill
Councillor David Edgar
Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
Councillor Peter Golds
Councillor Shafiqul Haque
Councillor Clare Harrisson
Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Aminur Khan
Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Md. Maium Miah
Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaquim
Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor John Pierce
Councillor Gulam Robbani
Councillor Candida Ronald
Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Andrew Wood

The Speaker of the Council, Councillor M. A. Mukit, MBE in the Chair

The meeting commenced at 7:32 p.m.

NOTE - AGENDA ORDER

During the meeting the Council agreed to vary the order of business. To aid clarity, the Minutes are 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. The order the business was taken at the meeting was as follows:

- Item 1 – Apologies for absence
- Item 2 – Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests
- Item 3 – Minutes
- Item 4 – Announcements
- Item 5 – Petitions

- Item 13.1 – Urgent Motion regarding nursery closures
- Item 13.2 – Urgent Motion regarding OFSTED Inspections
- Item 6 – Public Questions
- Item 7 – Mayor's Report
- Item 12.3 – Motion regarding the Best Value Inspection undertaken by PwC.
- Item 9 – Extension of Substance Misuse Strategy
- Item 11.1 – Mid-Year Review Report for Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2014./15
- Item 11.2 – The Structure and Governance arrangements of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Pension Fund

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Ohid Ahmed
- Councillor Andrew Cregan
- Councillor Ayas Miah
- Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah; and
- Councillor Oliur Rahman

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the Council meeting held on 10 September 2014 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

The Speaker announced that his Charity Ball in aid of the Tower Hamlets Food Bank was to take place on Friday 28th November at Eastwinter Garden. He invited all Members to purchase tickets to attend this worthwhile event.

Procedural Motion

At the conclusion of the Speaker's announcements, Councillor Mahbub Alam **moved**, and Councillor Alibor Choudhury **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied such that

Motion 12.4 'Motion regarding the NUT Manifesto for Education' be taken as the next item of business". The motion was put to the vote and was **defeated**.

5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

5.1 Petition to reduce the speed limit on Longnor Estate

Ms Joan Burton addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Shahed Ali, Cabinet Member for Clean and Green then responded to the matters raised in the petition. He was pleased to report that a consultation had already taken place on a potential borough-wide 20mph zone and that he hoped a decision could be taken on that in 2015. He promised to keep the petitioners updated.

RESOLVED

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

5.2 Petition regarding services for children

Ms Christine Trumper addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Gulam Robbani, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services then responded to the matters raised in the petition. He reiterated that no decision had yet been taken and that all consultation feedback would be fully considered. However, the highlighted that the Council had to find significant savings following central government cuts.

RESOLVED

That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Education, Social Care and Wellbeing, for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

5.3 Petition against 'the witch-hunt on Tower Hamlets'

Mr Nick Parkin and Mr Raihan Islam addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources then responded to the matters raised in the petition. He highlighted what he referred to as the 'attack on democracy and self-determination' by the Secretary of State and reported that the Best Value investigation had uncovered no illegality or failures in front line services.

RESOLVED

That the petition be referred to Directorate of Law, Probity and Governance, for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

Procedural Motion

Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed **moved,** and Councillor Danny Hassell **seconded**, a procedural motion "that Procedure Rule 19.2 be suspended to allow a further petition, on 'Save our Nurseries in Tower Hamlets', to be heard. The motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

5.4 Petition on 'Save our Nurseries in Tower Hamlets'

The petitioners addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Gulam Robbani, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services, then responded to the matters raised in the petition. He highlighted that a consultation exercise was underway and that feedback from users was important to the final decision. He also stated that visits would be made to the nurseries to help gather information for use when taking the decision.

RESOLVED

That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Education, Social Care and Wellbeing, for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

Procedural Motions

At this point Councillor Danny Hassell **moved**, and Councillor Asma Begum **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.5, Rule 13.1 be suspended to enable an urgent motion regarding nursery closures to be considered". The Speaker adjourned the meeting for 3 minutes to enable Councillors to consider the procedural motion. When the meeting reconvened, the procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

Following the conclusion of the debate on the urgent motion, Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved,** and Councillor Shiria Khatun **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.5, Rule 13.1 be suspended to enable an urgent motion regarding motion regarding OFSTED Inspections to be considered". The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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

6.1 Question from Mr Terry McGrenera:

Does the Council's Constitution or the legislative introducing the Executive Mayoral system permit an alternative way to elect a Chair of the Council, a Councillor, other than by Councillors?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing and Development

[Note: Before responding to Mr. McGrenera, Councillor Khan stated that it was with sadness that she informed the Council of the death, earlier in the day, of a long-serving member of the authority's development control staff. Councillor Khan paid tribute to the officer's service and offered her condolences and those of the Council to his wife and family.]

Thank you Terry and apologies. The answer to your question is simply 'no'.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr McGrenera

I was expecting that response and I would like to explain the reason for my question. My question arises from the regrettable events that took place at the previous council meeting in September. At the September meeting there were two adjournments for legal advice, one walk-out and zero respect for the democratic process on occasions. That said, since the decision to have a directly elected mayor the position of Speaker has become inherently a more difficult one in no small part because of the circumstances surrounding the fallout from the decision to have a directly elected mayor in 2010.

In these circumstances is it not time to change the constitution regarding the way the speaker is chosen in order that they are equal to the changed conditions in which the council conducts council meetings. In my opinion it is no longer tenable that the position of Speaker is seen as a sinecure or used for symbolic purposes by whichever party has the greater number of councillors. Also under the present arrangements the speaker is chosen without appearing before any committee, for example, the Overview and Scrutiny committee, so that their suitability can be tested. In summary I am asking that the council's constitution is changed in order to help prevent any regrettable incidents taking place in the future?

Summary of Councillor Rabina Khan's response to the supplementary question

That was very interesting. It was the Blair administration that introduced the elected Mayoral system. People have to trigger a yes for Mayor vote and that happened in 2010. Most famously the Labour Party does have a track record

of imposing Mayoral candidates, sometimes Councillors and possibly MPs as well. But what they don't understand is that it is their own ideas which is in the democracy which is operating in this Borough. True democracy allows opposition to operate. You can see it in this Borough you can see it in Tower Hamlets that the opposition here enjoy democracy because they are able to operate, they are able do the things that they care about such as put up motions and do the things they want outside the Council Chamber.

6.2 Question from Mr. Stuart Madewell:

Has the Mayor estimated what the likely cost to Council Tax Payers in Tower Hamlets will be for the three Commissioners imposed by the DCLG and supported by the Labour Party?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Thank you. In short, I think the Mayor is not in a position to negotiate with the commissioners on their salaries and fees. This is something that will be undertaken by the champion of transparency, the man who gave a £1M contact to Price Waterhouse Cooper in one night. It will be left to him to negotiate the terms with the commissioners. However, we have done a bit of a desk top assessment of how much it could cost. We have looked at other Authorities that have had commissioners. Obviously there are variations in commissioners for different things. But they have cost in excess of a £1000 a day. So if we have three commissioners that is £3000 a day. Five days, that is £15000 a week of your hard earned money which could be used more sensibility on dealing with some of these cuts and protecting savings. So the bottom line is we haven't got an accurate figure for you, but you can expect a hefty bill.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr Madewell

Thank you. The Council is facing £100m-worth of cuts in the next financial year imposed by the Tory Government. Now we learn of the £1m from the cost of the Price Waterhouse Cooper report. And on top of this, Councillor Choudhury is now telling us that we do not know the costs of the commissioners but it could be in excess of £3000 per day. My question is does he agree with me that the Labour Party have now made their choice to loyally support Eric Pickles' commissioners. Councillor Rachael Saunders has made it clear that she thinks it would justify sending in the commissioners as Labour lost the election in May. Does he also agree with me that if you compare Tower Hamlets with a Borough like Rotherham where there was a child abuse scandal which the Labour Party did nothing about and no commissioners were sent in there. My question is this: Will the Overview and Scrutiny Committee make sure for the tax payers there is value for money from the commissioners that are sent in?

Summary of Councillor Alibor Choudhury's response to the supplementary question

You'll find that everyone on this side of the Council totally agrees with what you are saying. I want to make one extra point. We are talking about public monies here and we are talking about several hundred thousand of public money if not more which has to usually go through a process. It's our intention to ensure any money agreed in terms of salaries and fees goes through a very public process so the public can see exactly how much the Labour Party has cost you.

6.3 Question from Mr. Stephen Beckett:

Why did Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, send auditors to the Council?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Thank you Mr Beckett.

It is widely known why Price Waterhouse Cooper came to our Borough. But for those who don't know it was a politically motivated move on behalf of our colleagues opposite who felt that they could not win an election unless they smeared this Mayor, unless they cooked up lies which would confuse and cloud the minds of voters in the last election. The bottom line was that the Price Waterhouse Cooper report was the act of Mr Pickles. It came in and found nothing but cost you £1M.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr Beckett

Other Local Authorities have been shown to be corrupt, incompetent and callous, far beyond the allegations made against Tower Hamlets. Do you think that the media, the DCLG Secretary, aided and abetted by local politicians are fabricating a moral panic, a fake outrage that heavily relies on Islamophobia to divert attention from the failure of government policies and the deeper and more serious abuse, corruptions and cover ups at Westminster and elsewhere?

Summary of Councillor Alibor Choudhury's response to the supplementary question

Absolutely. I want to add that the Government, who shout about how they are clamping down on corrupt Councils have obviously overlooked their own Councils. I will give you some examples. If you look at Basingstoke and Deane, where their own internal audits found issues with their grants processes. There was no intervention at all from Mr Pickles. Furthermore, you can look at Tory Croydon. They forgot to collect £40M in Council Tax owed to them, again overlooked by Eric Pickles. There is another one:- Kensington and Chelsea, where there are claims, rife claims of corruption and also failings in their disability services. Again, another one where they decided to

overlook. They decided to pick on Tower Hamlets for exactly the reasons you set out.

6.4 Question from Mr. Mickey Ambrose:

What did the Police say about the allegations of fraud and corruption that PWC came in to find at the Council?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

I see this as a waste of Police time. The Police, and I will quote verbatim, when they were handed the file after the politically motivated Panorama programme, they responded within a week by saying that there was no credible evidence of criminality within the files to provide reasonable grounds to suspect that fraud or any other offence has been committed.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr Ambrose

Should then an apology be made to the people of Tower Hamlets for running the Borough through the mud, because what's disappointing is next week I am attending an awards ceremony for a football club that has been in this Borough for over 30 years who have produced over 170 football players. Senrab Football Club have been nominated for the Pride of Sports Awards and it's very disappointing that every week we just hear about the smears and allegations which are ruining this Borough - the Borough I was a milk boy delivering for half a crown in Poplar High Street. It's disappointing tonight that people are not supporting what the Mayor is trying to do and so on. So I am just asking the question should people here apologise to the people of Tower Hamlets for the disgraceful way that our name has been run through the mud and I just like to say that if Senrab do win the Pride of Sports Awards we will have some good press. The Mayor has already spoken to Sharon and Tony Carroll at surgery and has sent his support to them.

Summary of Councillor Alibor Choudhury's response to the supplementary question

The short answer is yes but I want to make this point. They tried to smear the Mayor, they tried to lie about Tower Hamlets First to stop us winning at the ballot box and now they have decided to get Eric Pickles involved so that they can intervene in a Council which is functioning perfectly well and delivering some of the best services in the Country. The idea is to delay or even stop certain services from being provided to the community. I think the opposite benches did not think through what they were doing at the time. Now what they have ended up doing is punishing the community. Because the bottom line is that if they affect our delivery, it hurts out there in the community. That's exactly what they have done. For that, I think that they should apologise profusely.

6.5 Question from Mr. John Allison:

Residents are rightly concerned how the recent PwC report and Eric Pickles' comments have portrayed the borough. Can the Cabinet Member assure us that Council services aren't being affected by this?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Thank you Mr Allison I would love to give you a guarantee that none of our front line services in future will be affected but for the time being none of our front line services have been impacted. We intend to keep it that way. Despite the report not finding any fraud or criminality they are going to send in Commissioners and Commissioners are here to do a job. They could help us or they could hamper us and I can't predict the future and I'm hoping they will help us despite some of the antics from the colleagues opposite.

We are a resilient Borough, we've always come back fighting, the cuts are going to bite soon if not already and we hope to continue with our provision of front line services at the levels that they are currently. Things will be tough in future but we hope that we have a steady ship and we deliver for the people of Tower Hamlets.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr Allison

| wondered if the Councillor would agree with me that I really find it astounding that a time of swingeing cuts like this and rising demand for Council services, Councillors have been spending so much time and energy on such negative campaigning in the Borough its astonishing.

This administration has been delivering amazing successes and instead of concentrating and focusing on trying to alleviate the distress caused to their constituents by these cutbacks they've been engaging in this negative campaign. It's definitely time to move on and work together for the benefit of all the residents in the Borough. That's the question. I wonder if Councillor Choudhury agrees with me.

Summary of Councillor Alibor Choudhury's response to the supplementary question

Sorry short answer as well. I totally agree Mr Allison but the point here is that we have people here in this Council who are very self-centred and are very ignorant of what is going on out there.

And I hope that they will be educated today and they will grow up, move on and do what is right for the public of Tower Hamlets.

6.6 Question from Mr. Mohsin Uddin:

There are reports that Eric Pickles has sent a "hit squad" to Tower Hamlets Council and has taken over the running of the Council. Can the Lead Member confirm is this is true?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Thank you Mr Uddin I can confirm that these stories are absolute nonsense. They are unfounded and they usually form the part of the rhetoric that you'll get from the colleagues opposite and the colleagues in the far back who also thrive on misleading people. I can confirm we are talking to Commissioners. Their intention is not to come in and take over the Council or take over the running of the Executive. Their remit in so far as I understand it is to assist.

So their remit is to support the Council in continuing to deliver services of a high quality. Thank you.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr Uddin

My next question is if the inspectors are coming in and if they do attempt to intervene in our key services and undermine the Mayor and the Councillors, would the public be made aware of this?

Summary of Councillor Alibor Choudhury's response to the supplementary question

I think I can say for the record that this Council operates transparently so whenever the Council is delivering its services the public will be aware of how they are delivered and who they are delivered to, so I am sure that whatever we do or whether we work in tandem or they oversee, you will be aware of what is going on.

6.7 Question from Ms. Kathy McTasney:

Which Organisations received MSG funding from the Council? Was it just Bengali and Somali groups?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

The list of organisations that were awarded MSG funding is available on the Councils web site. One hundred and seventy five organisations were funded across a broad range of ethnicities within the borough.

Thank you Ms McTasney I will say very briefly that it was about where funding was required to serve a purpose. It was about need. It was about making sure that people across the whole borough got a service. The majority of grants went to organisations who served the whole Borough or a large part of

the Borough. I'll give you some examples so you are clear about what I'm saying. We are talking about Age Concern, the Tower Hamlets Law Centre, the Citizens Advice Bureau, Tower Project, Bromley-by-Bow Centre, City Gateway, The Royal Society for the Blind, Mudchute Farm. There are many more.

There are a mix of organisations who cater for all sorts of people that live in our borough and even the PWC report says that there was no bias when it came to awarding funding for these organisations.

Summary of supplementary question from Ms McTasney

Why would the coalition of councillors, Tory and Labour suggest some community groups received more grants than others? Who are they that they believe are more deserving?

This has created a community tension within our community and many of our residents and I would hope the Mayor and the Council are doing all they can to set the record straight.

Summary of Councillor Alibor Choudhury's response to the supplementary question

Tower Hamlets is renowned for serving its poor communities and it has been doing that from the time that history began. It's very clear that the coalition this unholy alliance between the red socialists or the blue socialists sorry they're not red they're blue and the red Tories were interested in just politicising the whole grants process. They weren't interested where people were suffering or where needs needed to be met.

It was more about dividing our community, pitting one community against another and they did a very good job using the media to divide us.

It is very clear and it was said earlier by a person where you're standing.
It was about Islamophobia. There was a lot of race played and there were a lot of things that were very uncomfortable and I don't think I should be talking about right now but they weren't along the right lines so yes it was about a coalition that were here to cause trouble and not do anything and in fact they did a great disservice to the community by playing it that way.

Questions 6.8 to 6.10 were not put due to lack of time. The Service Head, Democratic Services stated that written responses would be provided. [Note: The written responses are included in Appendix A to these minutes.]

7. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor made his report to the Council meeting, extending a warm welcome to all present. During his presentation he reported on the Best Value Inspection that had been undertaken on the Council by

PricewaterhouseCoopers. He highlighted that the Council provided excellent services but that where process and governance issues were identified they would be corrected.

When he had completed his report, at the invitation of the Speaker the Leaders of the other political groups each then responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

Procedural Motion

At the conclusion of her response to the Mayor's report, Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Shiria Khatun **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied such that Motion 12.3 'Motion regarding the Best Value Inspection undertaken by PwC' be taken as the next item of business. The motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

8. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

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

8.1 Question from Councillor Clare Harrisson

Does the Mayor regret blocking Labour's attempt to recruit a new Chief Executive?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

My answer is very short as well. Let's look at it differently. Does Labour regret voting against the appointment of the first BME Chief Executive that this Borough would have had?

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Clare Harrisson

That's not an answer to my question. I speak as a new Councillor, I was involved as the Chair of the Human Resources Committee. We started a process which you walked out of at our last meeting, refusing to partake in it because you object fundamentally to a Chief Executive. Considering the Price Waterhouse Cooper report specifies that some of the governance issues that you have admitted exist may be helped by having a Chief Executive with appropriate powers, moving forward will the Mayor support recruiting a new Chief Executive and devolving the appropriate powers to him?

Summary of Councillor Alibor Choudhury's response to the supplementary question

This administration will not take lessons from a Labour Party that colludes and works constantly with the Tories to stop us getting a first BME Chief Executive.

8.2 Question from Councillor Abjol Miah

After 6 months we've finally seen Eric Pickles' £1M Best Value Report. Are Tower Hamlets residents getting best value for money?

Response by Councillor Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

You know from hearing us and from everything that's been said in the community that this inspection, this audit was a politically motivated one and has cost us over £1M. It's clearly not value for money for residents or for this Council.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Abjol Miah

I've seen a lot of politics happening in the Council Chamber here. Best Value for money - as a Londoner do you think that Londoners deserve best value for money and do you think other Councils should be investigated and that Eric Pickles is just picking on Tower Hamlets for a specific agenda?

Summary of Councillor Alibor Choudhury's response to the supplementary question

I think that this is a ruse, a ploy. I think what Eric Pickles did in coalition with the Tower Hamlets Labour Party was about politics and about removing our first BME elected Mayor. It is very clear that there are many Councils that Eric Pickles has deliberately overlooked and I won't give you the reasons why.

8.3 Question from Councillor Peter Golds

Will the Mayor, in view of the confirmation in section 2.112 of the Best Value Inspection by Price Waterhouse that he has "reserved to himself substantially all of the decision making powers which it is legally possible for an Executive Mayor to exercise", answer the following question with regard to the disposal of 111-113 Mellish Street, E14.

Being aware of the comments in Section 5.182 which identify a close relationship between the group seeking to secure 111-113 Mellish Street and himself, will he explain his decision to promote this acquisition by this particular group in light of the flawed process identified in Sections 5.193 to 5.216 of the PWC report?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Councillor Golds is talking about the lease that was offered to the Docklands Community Organisation. It is about the acquisition of the Mellish Street site. I want to say for the record that the community organisation with its partners acquired the building through a process which involved rigorous scrutiny. Our Asset Management Team had assessed all bids against the criteria which was very robust. They were awarded the site and have complied with all the requirements of this Council.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Peter Golds

May I refer the Mayor, as he does exercise all Executive power, to read 5.193 and 5.216 of the Price Waterhouse Cooper report that are exactly the opposite of that. They most certainly did not comply with all the required things. There is a relevant point that PWC do allude to but I will point it out, that the person running the Docklands Community Organisation was of course the Tower Hamlets First candidate for Blackwall and Cubitt Town.

Summary of Councillor Alibor Choudhury's response to the supplementary question

As usual Councillor Golds is making up stories and he cannot substantiate what he has just said. I will reconfirm that the organisation acquired the premises through a due process. There were due diligence checks done and to date they have complied with all of our requirements.

8.6 Question from Councillor Chris Chapman

Will the Mayor inform the Council as to why he was absent from the Remembrance Day Commemoration on Sunday November 9th?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing and Development

Thank you for your question.

In his absence, the Mayor asked Mickey Ambrose, former footballer and Duke of Edinburgh Awards Ambassador to represent him and lay a wreath on his behalf. The Mayor did attend a remembrance service on Friday at City Hall with other Mayors and Council Leaders, and the Armistice Day event at the Town Hall. The Mayor also hosted a reception for war veterans after the event. The Mayor has continuously and consistently attended Remembrance Day but unfortunately on this occasion he was unable to do so.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Chris Chapman

Does he feel that his decision to send a replacement who did not sit in the prominently positioned empty chair at the front, his decision not to attend in

2010 at all, his decision in 2012 to try to hire out Trinity Gardens for Christmas and New Year parties, which received national condemnation, and finally his decision in 2013 to arrive late, leave his chair empty, stand at the side and barge ahead of other representatives to lay his wreath then leave? Does he feel that these decisions reflect poorly on him as a political leader of this Authority and what message does he feel that this sends to the war veterans as to the degree of respect he affords to the countless men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in defence of this Country?

Summary of Councillor Rabina Khan's response to the supplementary question

Thank you for your very emotional output. I am taking this seriously as it is the Tory government where we have seen ex-servicemen and ex-veterans homeless in London. That's what you've done.

Questions 8.7 to 8.22 were not put due to lack of time, Question 8.4 was not put as the questioner was not present. Question 8.5 was not put as the Council had earlier in the meeting resolved that the questioner be not further heard. The Service Head, Democratic Services stated that written responses would be provided. [Note: The written responses are included in Appendix A to these minutes.]

Guillotine Motion

At this point the meeting had sat for three hours and, with no motion to extend the meeting proposed, the guillotine came into effect. As set out in Procedure Rule 9.3, all remaining reports on the agenda were deemed formally moved and seconded and were put to the vote with no further discussion.

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

9.1 Report from Cabinet meeting: Extension of Substance Misuse Strategy

The Council considered the recommendations of the Executive on the extension of the Substance Misuse Strategy. The recommendation was put to the vote under the guillotine procedure at Council Procedure Rule 9.

RESOLVED

To agree an extension of the current substance misuse strategy by one year to the end of March 2016.

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

There was no business to transact under this agenda item.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

11.1 Mid-Year Review Report for Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2014/15

The Council considered the report of the Acting Corporate Director, Resources setting out the mid-year review of the Council's Treasury Management and Investment Strategy. The recommendations were put to the vote under the guillotine procedure at Council Procedure Rule 9.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

2. To approve the changes to the minimum credit rating criteria; that is the removal of viability or financial strength rating and support ratings as set out in section 10 and table 1 of Appendix 3 to the report.

3. To approve the updated investment instruments as set out in section 10:15 and tables 2 and 3 of Appendix 3 to the report.

4. To approve the proposed new prudential indicator limit for investments over one year but no more than three years to £50 million from £25 million.

11.2 The Structure and Governance arrangements of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Pension Fund

The Council considered the report of the Acting Corporate Director, Resources regarding the structure and governance arrangements of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Pension Fund. The recommendations were put to the vote under the guillotine procedure at Council Procedure Rule 9.

RESOLVED

1. To note the proposed changes in the Governance Arrangements for LGPS Pension Funds with effect from 1 April 2015.

2. To delegate to the Pensions Committee the creation of the Pensions Board for the Tower Hamlets Pension Fund.

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

12.3 Motion regarding the Best Value Inspection undertaken by PwC

Councillor Peter Golds **moved**, and Councillor Chris Chapman **seconded**, the motion as printed on the agenda.

During debate Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Shiria Khatun **seconded**, an amendment. Following debate the amendment was put to the vote and was **agreed**. The substantive motion as amended was then put to the vote and was **agreed** as below.

RESOLVED

This Council believes:

1. That a wide range of local people and organisations have tenaciously fought long standing campaigns on unjust distribution of grants, improper decision making in the procurement of services and failures in the disposal of assets, including through rigorous scrutiny and debates at full council.

2. That public money is at stake, along with public trust and proper accountability. Every community in our country is entitled to the highest standards of probity and honesty in our democracy. No community should have to put up with lower standards of democracy and transparency.

3. That the Mayor and his administration can no longer avoid taking responsibility for their failures now that an audit report has set out multiple failures of the best value duty.

4. That in the debate in the House of Commons, Members of Parliament from across political parties were shocked by the failures of the administration and the Mayor.

5. That multiple failures of the best value duty – the statutory responsibility of local authorities to do the right thing with tax payer's money – are extremely serious, and that local people are deeply concerned about the leadership of this authority.

This Council further believes:

1. That the report sets out nine ongoing criminal investigations into alleged fraud relating to youth services.

2. That the report demonstrates that, through changes to grants recommendations, the Mayor chose to make cuts to vital services in the poorest parts of the borough, whilst giving money to organisations ruled ineligible.

3. That the view of the auditors is that “current governance arrangements do not appear to be capable of preventing or responding appropriately to failures of the best value duty”.

4. That Lutfur Rahman has brought shame to our great borough, and should consider his position.

5. That there are many important questions to which local people deserve answers.

This Council resolves:

1. To require from the Mayor and senior management team of the council a full response to the issues raised in the auditor’s report, including but not limited to answers to the following questions:

    - According to the audit report, there is evidence of nine incidents of alleged fraud in relation to the Youth and Community Service, and that “no discernible procurement process appears to have been followed”. Please provide the fullest possible information about these payments. Will the Mayor and corporate director cooperate fully to ensure that these police enquiries can be concluded as soon as possible? What action will the mayor take to reassure local people about the quality and integrity of their youth services?

    - The report has found that the Mayor’s decisions led to cuts in grants to the poorest parts of the borough. What is the mayor’s explanation for these cuts? What will he do to reinstate the services that were cut unjustly? Please provide full information about the monitoring that has been done of services funded through all grants awarded since May 2010.

    - There are multiple examples of buildings – Poplar Town Hall, Sutton St depot – sold to bidders who submitted their bids after those from their competitors had been opened. Why was a one year rent free period given, and why was £50,000 given for health and safety works? Why was £135,000 handed over to a private business? This incentive was not offered to other bidders. Does the Mayor regard this as acceptable practice? What will he do to prevent it happening again? Who does he regard as responsible for their failures of the Best Value Duty?

    - Over the course of this four year term the Mayor proposes to spend £1.4million on mayoral advisers. The audit report found that spending on his media advisers failed the best value duty. Will he cut his wasteful advisers instead of proposed cuts to nurseries for disabled children and proposed cuts to social services?

    - What was the 954 fund?

- Can the Mayor explain his role in the procurement of learning disability day services, as set out in the report? How did that decision relate to what was happening with the mainstream grants process?

2. This Council resolves that this should be sent to all Councillors by the 12th December 2014.

3. That this response should also answer all issues and questions raised in the original motion 12.3, and should cover all other issues of public concern and each of the best value failures identified.

4. That following receipt of this, and its consideration by political groups on the council, (or in any case if a response from the executive is not forthcoming) we mandate the Overview and Scrutiny committee to undertake further interrogation of issues raised in the report as it sees appropriate, and to report back to Full Council on its findings.

This Council further resolves:

1. That whilst it is a source of shame to this borough that we have reached the point of government intervention, this council resolves to work constructively with commissioners, assuming that they are appointed.

2. That it is vital that scrutiny arrangements are in place to provide democratic oversight of the work of the commissioners. To call on the head of paid service to ensure these arrangements are in place.

3. To call on the Head of Paid Service to convene the long awaited governance review, with councillor representation from all political groups and representatives from the LGA, as a matter of urgency, in the light of the governance failures set out in the report.

4. To reaffirm our position on the need for a Chief Executive with full authority, and permanent appointments to the other two statutory officer positions.

5. That, if Lutfur Rahman and his Cabinet increased the cost of the audit through delays, he should pay from his own pocket. Local people have already paid many times over for his failures.

Under Procedure Rule 17.6 all Councillors requested that their votes on the above resolution be recorded as follows:

In favour of the motion (24 Councillors):

Councillor Rajib Ahmed
Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed
Councillor Amina Ali
Councillor Craig Aston

Councillor Asma Begum
Councillor Rachel Blake
Councillor Chris Chapman
Councillor Dave Chesterton
Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Julia Dockerill
Councillor David Edgar
Councillor Clare Harrisson
Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Peter Golds
Councillor John Pierce
Councillor Candida Ronald
Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
Councillor Andrew Wood

Against the Motion (15 Councillors):

Councillor Abdul Asad
Councillor Suluk Ahmed
Councillor Shahed Ali
Councillor Mahbub Alam
Councillor Shah Alam
Councillor Alibor Choudhury
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury
Councillor Shafiqul Haque
Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Aminur Khan
Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Mohammed Maium Miah
Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaquim
Councillor Gulam Robbani

Procedural Motion

During the debate on the above motion, Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.16 Councillor Mahbub Alam be not further heard" due to misconduct. The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

Motions 12.1, 12.2 and 12.4 to 12.11 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 Motion regarding nursery closures

Councillor Danny Hassell **moved**, and Councillor Asma Begum **seconded**, the motion as **tabled**.

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

DECISION

This Council notes:

1. The proposal submitted by the Mayor and Cabinet for public consultation on the closure of the four council run nurseries in the borough - Mary Sambrook, Queen Mary, Overland and John Smith.

2. The excellent campaign run by local parents of children attending the nurseries to prevent the closure and the significant local support their campaign has attracted.

3. The concern of many parents about provision for disabled children in particular as a result of these proposals.

4. The statement of the Mayor at the November cabinet meeting that the savings proposals would be reviewed, which appeared to contrast to other proposals which were clearly withdraw at the meeting.

5. The letter sent by Cllr Danny Hassell to the Mayor on 7th November asking for further clarity on the remarks by the Mayor and calling for clearer information on the future of all four nurseries.

6. That Tower Hamlets has the highest levels of child poverty in the country.

7. Publicly run early years provision is generally of a much higher quality than that in the private, voluntary and independent sector.

This Council believes:

1. The early years are crucial to improving life chances and that the quality of provision has a significant impact on effectiveness.

2. The services provided by these nurseries to disabled children and their families are especially valuable and unlikely to be provided in the same way by alternative provision.

3. Council-run nurseries in Tower Hamlets provide important opportunities for young people and their families, and their continued operation should be a priority for this council.

This Council resolves:

To call on the Mayor to withdraw entirely the proposal to close all four council-run nurseries: Mary Sambrook; Queen Mary; Overland; and John Smith.

13.2 Motion regarding OFSTED Inspections

Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Shiria Khatun **seconded**, the motion as **tabled**.

Councillor Alibor Choudhury **moved** an amendment to include in the motion the names of the 6 independent schools. Councillors Rachael Saunders and Shiria Khatun indicated that they accepted the amendment and altered their motion accordingly.

Councillor Rabina Khan **moved** an amendment to add a bullet point under This Council notes 'To note that there is no evidence or suggestion whatsoever of an attempted takeover, as allegedly occurred in Birmingham under the so-called Trojan Horse scandal, at Sir John Cass School or any other school in Tower Hamlets.' Councillors Rachael Saunders and Shiria Khatun indicated that they accepted the amendment and altered their motion accordingly.

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

RESOLVED

This Council notes:

1. The outcome of the Ofsted inspections of six independent schools (namely; Al Mizan Primary, East London Islamic School, Ebrahim Academy, Jamaitul Ummah School, London East Academy and Mazahirul School), and Sir John Cass School published last week.

2. Concerns raised over safeguarding responsibilities within all of these schools; and concerns about the breadth and balance of the curriculum and experiences offered to children in some of the six independent schools.

3. That the council has no powers or responsibilities over the teaching and learning within the independent sector within the borough.

4. That there is no evidence or suggestion whatsoever of an attempted takeover, as allegedly occurred in Birmingham under the so-called

Trojan Horse scandal, at Sir John Cass School or any other school in Tower Hamlets.

This Council believes:

1. That the Government has diluted the powers of local authority over schools through the promotion and proliferation of academies and free schools who are not accountable to the local communities that they serve.

2. Council's responsibilities for safeguarding children in independent schools within their authority require the appropriate powers to carry this out.

3. That improvement in schools in the borough previously has taken place by a range of partners working in collaboration; the council, government, parents, teachers, school leaders and governors and wider community groups.

This Council resolves:

1. That Council officers should work proactively with parents, governors, teachers and pupils at Sir John Cass to address the issues raised by Ofsted.

2. To call on the Government to ensure that council are equipped with the appropriate powers to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities within in schools, including those in the private and independent sector.

3. For a full report on work in addressing the safeguarding concerns in independent schools in the borough to be presented to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB).

The meeting ended at 10.35 p.m.

Speaker of the Council

APPENDIX 'A' – WRITTEN RESPONSES TO PUBLIC AND MEMBERS' QUESTIONS THAT WERE NOT PUT AT THE MEETING

6.8 Question from Mr. Gilbert Lindsell:

How much has it cost for the PwC report and where is the funds coming from?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Over £1M but the question is how did Pickles decide that Tower Hamlets residents should pay?

Pickles has very good timing. He ordered the audit just one day after legislation came into effect that forced local authorities to pick up the tab for this stuff.

Let me make that very clear- Pickles timed his announcement deliberately so that you- the residents of a borough where one in two children are in poverty- had to pick up the tab for the Tories' vendetta.

We don't expect Pickles to pay for the audit out of his own pocket. But if he cut his £500k limo budget for a few years he could probably afford to.

But somehow I doubt whether that will happen.

6.9 Question from Mr. Khalik Miah:

Why has the One Stop Community Centre been given a notice to quit?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

I am sorry about this, the property is owned by Tower Hamlets Community Housing (THCH) and the freeholder is Network Rail.

However, Councillor Mahbub, myself and others have made several representations to Network Rail, but they have not attended meetings and have not been co-operative.

6.10 Question from Mr. Will Nutland

Could the Mayor tell us why the Council is still spending public money on external lawyers to take Rich Mix, a successful and well-loved charity, through proceedings in the High Court when Rich Mix have made a public offer to settle the case with the Council which would ensure that the Council receives the entire £850k it is claiming was paid to Rich Mix, even in the absence of any loan agreement being put in place at the time any money was advanced or any executed agreement being provided to the High Court?

Response by Councillor Shafiqul Haque, Cabinet Member for Culture

The Council is currently in litigation with the Rich Mix in an attempt to recover £850,000 owing as a result of an unpaid loan.

It would not be appropriate to comment further on the nature of discussions specific to this litigation

8.4 Question from Councillor Ayas Miah

What measures will the Mayor take to ensure that when a transfer of property takes place there is a proper process set up in order to meet the Council's best value duty?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

PWC raised concerns in 3 out of 185 property transactions conducted in the period of inspection.

Officers are implementing improvements indicated by the PWC report.

8.5 Question from Councillor Mahbub Alam

Can the Lead Member list the number of awards achieved by the Council since the arrival of PwC Auditors in April 2014?

Response by Councillor Oliur Rahman, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Economic Development

Thank you for your question.

I am proud that we as a Council have won a significant number of awards since the arrival of the Auditors.

Amongst the many awards, our school meals service has been named the best in Britain at the Lead *Association for Education Catering (LACA) Awards*. Tower Hamlets is the first Council to have won this award twice.

We were identified as the best performing borough in London for achieving the *Healthy Schools Award* in July this year.

The Greater London Authority awarded seven *Tower Hamlets schools have been awarded Gold Club status* last month.

Once again Victoria Park has been crowned the nation's favourite park at the people's choice Awards 2014. Victoria Park gained more than 13,000 votes to be crowned the best park in the country. More than 32,000 votes were cast in the competition organised by Keep Britain Tidy.

8.7 Question from Councillor Rachel Blake

What has the Mayor done to secure a tenant for the vacant supermarket unit on Roman Road in the former Morrison's site?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing and Development

This is part of the Roman Road's Working Group Action Plan.

There is a plan for a new Tesco's to be built, which is planned to be open in Spring 2015.

8.8 Question from Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah

Residents of Bow will be delighted with the new secondary school on the banks of the River Lea. Can the Lead Member for Education and Children's Services update us on the progress with the rest of our secondary school buildings programme?

Response by Councillor Gulam Robbani, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

The completion of the new Bow School is a significant achievement for Tower Hamlets.

The Building Schools for the Future programme is now almost complete with the final project completion due at Central Foundation School by the end of the year. The programme overall has invested in excess of £300m in 18 schools bringing significant improvements to the education opportunities for young people in Tower Hamlets.

The new Bow School has also helped to create hundreds of extra school places to meet the growing need for more school places.

Seeing as our schools are so popular, I am sure this is news that all our residents will be pleased about!

8.9 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood

Please explain how you the Mayor managed to keep clear from the detail of grant awards whilst also admitting to intervening in 32 cases (PwC report para 2.36)?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

The Mayor did not get involved in the detail of any of the grant awards. There was an appeal process and all applicants were able to use that process.

8.10 Question from Councillor Shiria Khatun

Will the Mayor take this opportunity to respond to the suggestion of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government that he "make a substantial contribution out of his own pocket to the (PwC) report" - surely he would not impose on the people of Tower Hamlets the heavy financial costs of his decision "not to cooperate and to obfuscate and delay" that damning report?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Will Mr Pickles take this opportunity to pay back the £500k he has spent on limousines or the £70k he has spent on tea and biscuits!

8.11 Question from Councillor Shah Alam

Residents of Mile End Ward were pleased to see this Administration opening a new children's centre on the Bede Estate. Can the Lead Member outline what additional activities the centre will offer to local families?

Response by Councillor Gulam Robbani, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

Thank you for your question Councillor Alam. I am incredibly excited about the Children's Centre. It brings new opportunities that will benefit a range of people in borough, and is also much more accessible. It's got a great range of facilities for new parents, such as health review and post-natal and antenatal clinics. For parents with slightly older children, there is space to offer sessional day-care and plans for cook-and-eat sessions in the brand new kitchen space.

There's lots of space for children to play: the centre has increased capacity for crèches, a range of stay and play activities and a large garden that can be used for outdoor play. The centre will also provide a new home for the North East Locality Young Parents Group, and individual counselling and group work with the Women and Girls Network.

Finally, East End Homes are now developing a programme of community provision including a youth service that will complement the opening hours of the children's centre. So it truly does provide something for all parts of the community!

8.12 Question from Councillor Craig Aston

Will the Mayor explain para 2.33 of the PwC report where 81% of officer recommendations were revised or rejected and 33 applicants were recommended for grants despite not making the minimum criteria?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

The Council will work with Mr Pickles on this aspect of the process for future grants.

8.13 Question from Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed

The Mayor is used to expensive media advice – however does he agree with the now readily available and free advice that he should consider his position?

Response by Councillor Oliur Rahman, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Economic Development

No.

8.14 Question from Councillor Gulam Kibriya

Crime and tackling anti-social behaviour has been a key concern for our residents. Will the Lead Member for Community Safety highlight the impact of the new mobile Police Station introduced by the Mayor?

Response by Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

The new Mobile Police Centre has been really popular with residents and has been helping us to prevent crime and ASB in the borough.

So far it has attracted residents and passers-by to stop and make reports, to share their ASB concerns and been reassured of the work being undertaken at the ward walkabouts. It has been deployed across the borough and is being received very well.

It has been really important in ensuring that residents feel safe and have face-to-face contact – replacing the police stations that are being scrapped because of Tory cuts. We want to use it in areas where crime is high but reporting low, to make sure that residents feel confident and able to report crime.

It will also be used to support officers in busy areas such as Brick Lane on weekend evenings, and be in attendance at safer transport police, community safety and London Fire Brigade awareness open days and events.

8.15 Question from Councillor Julia Dockerill

Will the £407,700 paid to bodies highlighted in the PwC report as failing to meet the minimum criteria now be re-claimed so that it can be granted to organisations that do meet the criteria and do represent all of our local communities?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

No.

8.16 Question from Councillor Marc Francis

Will the Lead Member provide an update on the action taken to address council leaseholders' concerns about service charges since the motion agreed by Full Council in January?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing and Development

Thank you for your question. There are several strands of work that I am undertaking with the Project Steering Group of Leaseholders, including a review of the ALMO's progress in implementing the 54 Beevers & Struthers recommendations was commissioned. The review is underway and leaseholders who are members of the Project Steering Group have been involved with the management and appointment of the independent auditors. A draft report is expected soon.

Additionally, a further audit was commissioned to ensure that the costs charged to leaseholders and the underpinning methodology, is statute and lease compliant, transparent, and represents good value. Again the leaseholder members of the Project Steering Group were given the opportunity to submit evidence to the auditors. The report has now been completed.

Both the review and audit are due to be reported to the Project Steering Group and the recommendations will then be finalised and form the basis of service improvements.

8.17 Question from Councillor Maium Miah

Will the Lead Member for Economic Development update us on the progress this Council is making with supporting our young people on the apprenticeship programme?

Response by Councillor Oliur Rahman, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Economic Development

We have made great progress supporting our young people to get on apprenticeships.

Our work on apprenticeships through procurement is leading the field in London and is cited as a model for other boroughs, we are proud that we now have the highest ever recorded employment rates at 64.9%.

I am even more proud that we won the prestigious:
"Best work in generating Apprenticeships through local procurement" at the London Councils Apprenticeship Awards 2014.

We already have 669 apprenticeships this year and will be opening the latest Council apprenticeship recruitment programme soon to support even more local young people to train while they earn London living wage.

Start year	No of apprentices	16-24 year olds	24+
2011 -	64 Apprentices	58	6
2012 -	131 Apprentices	116	15
2013 -	148 Apprentices	135	13
2014 -	669 Apprentices	657	12

8.18 Question from Councillor Danny Hassell

Can the Mayor please explain why, despite some of the highest levels of child poverty in both the country and the borough, grant funding for Bromley by Bow is some of the lowest in the borough and why there were significant reductions in grant funding by this administration compared to the recommendations by officers?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

This is not true. All our residents particularly those in poverty continue to be fully supported by this Council particularly under the Mayor who has introduced many child poverty initiatives including:

- Free School Meals for all children
- Mayor's Education Allowance for college students
- Mayor's University Grant

8.19 Question from Councillor Ansar Mustaquim

Can the Lead Member update us on progress with implementing the recommendations from the Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission?

Response by Councillor Aminur Khan, Cabinet Member for Policy, Strategy and Performance

Thank you for your question. We have made really positive progress towards implementing the recommendations of the Fairness Commission. This was recognised at November Cabinet where the Fairness Commission '1 year on' report was agreed.

This provided an update on all the Fairness Commission recommendations and the action plan adopted by the Council in April. Several Commissioners also attended and praised the work towards:

· Recommendation 2: "Tower Hamlets becomes an online borough" , towards which the Council and Partners are delivering events for UK Go Online week for the first time, alongside the creation of a Partnership Strategy and Action Plan.

· Recommendation 8: "Reimagine local employment services so they work better for local people and businesses", towards which the Council has reached agreement with Job Centre Plus on a Memorandum of Understanding and is developing a shared system for supporting residents into employment and monitoring their progress.·

· Recommendation 16: "That the standard of private rented accommodation is improved, and tenants better protected, through a landlord licensing scheme for Tower Hamlets", towards which Cabinet agreed in September to develop the evidence base required to implement the scheme.

Not only has the report influenced local policies but the report also highlighted that many of the themes and recommendations in the Fairness Commission report have been picked up nationally, including an emphasis on clamping down on payday lenders and providing access to affordable credit; making private sector housing more affordable and better regulated and campaigns around the cost of living.

8.20 Question from Councillor Candida Ronald

The PWC Inspectors have found severe failures of governance.
"… current governance arrangements do not appear to be capable of preventing or responding appropriately to failures of the best value duty ..." [2.23]

Their report also details the extraordinary power of the Mayor:
"The Mayor has reserved to himself substantially all of the decision making powers which it is legally possible for an executive mayor to exercise" [2.112]

Does the Mayor accept he is personally responsible for these failures?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Paragraph 2.21 of the report says:

"We do not ascribe any particular failure to any particular individual"

8.21 Question from Councillor Harun Miah

Like much of the country, during these tough economic times, many of our businesses and traders are struggling. Can the Lead Member set out how this Administration is supporting our small businesses and high streets?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Thank you for your question. We are implementing a range of initiatives and developing more to support small businesses and high streets. These include:

- The development of a “Healthy High Streets” policy which will promote the success and prosperity of high streets in the borough and support the businesses based there.
- Investment and regeneration in town centres across the borough, including Whitechapel, Roman Road, Bethnal Green, Brick Lane, Burdett Road, Watney Market and Chrisp Street - all with the objective of increasing trade for the businesses based there.
- A programme of events and publicity to celebrate and promote small local businesses in the borough, linked to Small Business Saturday on 6 December.
- The Tower Hamlets Business Forum, launched in 2013, providing networking and communication opportunities between borough businesses as well between businesses and the Council
- The Council’s Business Enquiries Desk, which provides advice and referrals to appropriate sources of training, support and finance for local businesses.
- A review of the Council’s procurement procedures to maximise the opportunities that our own spending creates for local enterprise.
- Developing Wi-Fi zones in town centres to support businesses and attract more visitors.
- Exploring opportunities to create low cost workspace for local businesses.

8.22 Question from Councillor Suluk Ahmed

Can the Lead Member for Housing and Development update us on the progress with the Whitechapel Vision Regeneration and the new Town Hall development?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing and Development

Thank you for your question.

The Council is progressing the delivery of the Whitechapel Vision master plan at pace and on the 27th October 2014 held the first Strategic Partnership Board meeting to take forward the implementation of the regeneration project.

This meeting was attended by key stakeholder partners from the GLA, TFL, Queen Mary University, NHS Barts, Sainsbury and London & Quadrant Housing Group.

In tandem the Council has set up new regeneration Delivery team and is having a number of pre-application planning discussions with landowners on five major development sites across the area, which are collectively estimated to deliver some 2,500 new homes, affordable workspace, community facilities and open spaces.

Furthermore, the new Delivery team is currently progressing a number of regeneration initiatives in Whitechapel including ‘quick win’ projects to visually improve the appearance of the area, engage the local community, while creating opportunities for further investment, employment, training and bids to external public funding sources to regenerate the area as a whole.