

Mayor's Report to Council 21st March 2018

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Key Events/Announcements

Election: This is the final Full Council meeting before the election, and preparations are well underway to deliver a free and fair election on Thursday 3rd May. The council, working with the Police, has launched a new online tool which people can use to raise any concerns about possible electoral fraud. This is available on the council's website, and anything raised will be sent to the Returning Officer, Elections Team and the Police, who will take appropriate action.

Petitions: A large number of petitions were submitted to this Council meeting and unfortunately only the first four that were received will be presented at the meeting. All other petitions received will receive a proper written response from a Corporate Director.

I'm also aware that a further petition, organised by trade unions in the Town Hall, will not be presented at the meeting. I am a committed trade unionist, and while this petition has not been accepted by officers for inclusion on the agenda, this does not mean that their petition will go unheard.

Council Budget: Council agreed my formal Budget proposals last month at the first meeting, for the 3rd year running. I am grateful for the work that went into this, and the ongoing work to deliver proposals. It is a Budget focussed on employment and tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, with £1.4m invested in tackling crime and ASB on top of the £3.3m to fund an extra 39 police officers, and a £1.8m investment into supporting residents into work.

Despite the deep and sustained cuts to our funding by the Government, unlike other councils we're keeping all our libraries, leisure centres and children's centres open and we have protected free school meals and our 100% council tax benefit for the poorest residents.

Spring Statement: The Chancellor delivered his Spring Statement this month, with an astonishing lack of attention given to the perilous state of local authority budgets. Local government is facing a funding gap of £5.8 billion by 2020. The Chancellor hinted he might review cuts to public services by setting "an overall path for public spending for 2020 and beyond", without giving any details of what this would mean for local authorities.

Even Conservative-run councils are struggling with the Conservative cuts, with Northamptonshire County Council being the first council in nearly 20 years to issue a section 114 notice imposing immediate spending controls on the local authority.

The Chancellor had an opportunity to reverse cuts to local authorities and make some crucial investments in adult social care, children's services, schools and frontline services like women's refuges. Instead the Chancellor's silence means we will have no respite from the deep and sustained cuts to council budgets.

Children's Services: We continue to make progress on our children's services improvement with the last Ofsted monitoring visit finding that "no children were identified as being at risk of immediate harm".

The inspectors noted that "most improvements identified by the previous visit have been sustained and, in many cases, further improved" and that "senior leaders and elected members have an increasing in-depth knowledge of their strengths and areas of weakness."

Following the work undertaken to improve the council's Children's Services over the past seven months, Ofsted noted "most children benefit from the prompt allocation of cases to experienced social workers" and that "more robust performance management processes are beginning to make a discernible difference for more young people and their families."

On top of the progress already made, this year's budget invests an additional £5m for Children's services, to deliver more improvements to services for vulnerable children.

Youth Service Relaunch: When I was elected, the Youth Service was in crisis, facing serious allegations of fraud and malpractice and with some youth centres only open on paper.

So after a great deal of work that went into addressing the challenges the Youth Service faced, I was very pleased to launch our new and improved Youth Service at the Haileybury Youth Centre last month. Our Service is one of the biggest and best funded in London, with around 37 venues offering over 370 hours of high quality activities every single week. We now have a Youth Service that is genuinely focussed on providing a good service to our young people.

Somali Taskforce: The Taskforce celebrated its anniversary last month and the success continues. Among other achievements, the Taskforce has registered over 150 individuals for employment information, advice and guidance, and hosted an employment and training fair with WorkPath.

Raines House: The proposed refurbishment and remodelling of Raines House will improve the facilities within the building and protect its historic fabric. As part of the Council's consultation, we have held two consultation events at Raines House to gather residents' views on the refurbishment of the building to create a community hub. The intention is to submit a planning application for the refurbishment works, appoint a specialist contractor and start work on site at the end of September 2018. The work is expected to take between 6 to 8 months to complete and will be re-opened in time for the 300 year anniversary celebrations in May 2019.

In the meantime, existing community groups are continuing to use the building at no cost and we have offered Pollyanna temporary accommodation at Chandler Street and will be looking for an alternative venue for the social club activities. When the refurbishment works have been carried out the building will be available for existing groups, including the Wapping Social Club and the daytime bingo group, to return to and for new groups to book space as required. Consideration will also be given to the retention of the bar.

Jamboree: A petition and a motion have been submitted on this issue. Jamboree is an important grassroots music venue to our residents, who enjoy the jazz and folk music performed here.

I know that Jamboree is due to celebrate its 10th anniversary shortly and it will be a great shame to lose this popular venue in Tower Hamlets. We have a strong history in Tower Hamlets of supporting and nurturing cultural venues and I am determined to continue this commitment.

We have provisions in the Local Plan to protect cultural venues, and I have asked officers to look into options to support Jamboree to stay in their current much loved venue. I have also written to Sudbury Properties asking them to review the decision to issue a notice to quit.

Officers rejected the Asset of Community Value application, a decision which was taken independently by officers. There is no right of appeal but we are talking to Jamboree about all their options including making a fresh application.

Acid Charter: We continue to roll out our Acid Charter across the borough, with around 100 retailers signed up and promising not to sell corrosive products to under 18s and to ask for identification from people who look younger than 25 before the substances are sold. The Government's new sentencing guidelines are to be welcomed, but the Government must take far tougher action to tackle these horrific incidents.

New Town Hall: Planning permission has been granted for the new Town Hall, at the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel. While the cost of the building will be £105m, we will save the £5m a year we currently spend on renting the current Town Hall, and an estimated £78m will be recouped from the sale of old council buildings that will no longer be needed once staff have moved into the new building. These sites will, I hope, be used for much needed new housing. This marks an important milestone for the future of our council.

Protections for Private Sector Tenants: We are launching a consultation on an additional licensing scheme for landlords of multiple let private sector properties. This builds on the success of our landlord licensing scheme, which is driving up standards for private renters'. We have launched our Private Renters' Charter, and we hope that extending our licencing to protect residents in Houses of Multiple Occupancy will be an additional support for residents.

Boishakhi Mela 2018: The 2018 Mela will take place in Weavers Fields, on Sunday 1st July from 12pm to 7pm, organised by the council's Arts, Parks and Events team. I'm delighted that the official date has been announced and I look forward to the celebration!

Borough of Culture: I would like to congratulate Waltham Forest Council on being named as winner of the London Borough of Culture 2019 and Brent Council on being named as the winner for 2020. Thank you to everyone who worked on and supported the bid from Tower Hamlets Council – unfortunately we weren't successful this time, but it put down a great starting point to build on in the future. In other news, I'm delighted that Tower Hamlets' joint bid with

Hackney to create a Creative Enterprise Zone around Hackney Wick and Fish Island has made the GLA's final shortlist.

We will now be using the funding awarded to work up our bid, and make the case for how we will support artists and creative businesses in our Boroughs

Finally: I would like to thank those members, officers and residents who have worked incredibly hard to turn the council around from the chaos and turmoil of the past.

While there remains a lot of work still to do, and while we cannot underestimate the challenges we face, I believe the council has turned a very important corner.

It takes a great deal of time and effort to transform a council from being so chaotic that Government Commissioners had to be sent to run services, into one which is run properly and focussed on providing the services that residents rely on.

The greatest risk now is a return to the past – to the days of election courts, Government intervention and damning audit reports. We simply cannot – and must not – put all our progress in jeopardy. No matter who wins in May.

Engagements and Meetings: 17 January to 20 March 2018

- 17 January 2018
 - Lettings meeting
 - Mile End Astro-Turf Official Opening Event
 - Full Council
- 18 January 2018
 - Visit to Bywater Recycling Centre
 - Meeting with Berkley Group
 - Meeting with Ballymore
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Shahjalal Mosque
 - Mayor's Surgery
- 19 January 2018
 - Acid Press Conference
- 22 January 2018
 - Visit to Leicester City Council's Children's Services
 - Children's Services Improvement Board
 - Night Patrol Visit
- 23 January 2018
 - LBC Interview
 - Meeting with TfL Walking & Cycling Commissioner
 - Meeting with Cllr Asma Begum
 - Meeting with Cllr Denise Jones and Corporate Director, Adults Services
 - Quintet Meeting
 - Public Realm meeting
 - Meeting with Head of Building Development, Children's Services
- 24 January 2018

- Meeting with Cllr Rachel Blake
- Mayor's Neighbourhood Refresh & Allocation of Capital Expenditure/Update on TFL Business Plan
- ITV Interview
- Civic Centre Project Board
- Meeting with Chief Executive
- O&S
- United East End meeting
- 25 January 2018
 - Meeting with Cllr John Pierce
 - Meeting with officers re. Funding for Community Groups/Organisations
 - Meeting with Cllr Asma Begum and Divisional Director, Community Safety
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Place
 - Attended Holocaust Memorial Exhibition: Chrisp Street Idea Store
 - Mayor's Surgery
 - Charity Dinner for Acid Victims
- 26 January 2018
 - Poplar Harca Visit
- 29 January 2018
 - Victoria Park meeting
 - Meeting with Care Solution Bureau
 - Meeting with Mile End East Community
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Place
 - Strategic Planning Meeting
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Governance
- 30 January 2018
 - Planning Meeting
 - Meeting with Cllr Sirajul Islam
 - Meeting with Committee Service Manager
 - Sylhet City Mayor reception
 - Meeting with officers re. King Edward Memorial Park
 - WorkPath Meeting
- 31 January 2018
 - Meeting with Amnesty International
 - Meeting with Vertex Training International
 - Meeting with Patrick Needham
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Civic Centre Board Meeting
- 1 February 2018
 - Mayor's Surgery
 - Somali Task Force One Year On Event
- 3 February 2018
 - London Tigers Women's Winter Workout
- 4 February 2018
 - THYL United 8-A-Side Winter League Cup Final
- 5 February 2018
 - Meeting with Cllr Amy Whitelock Gibbs

- Meeting with John Nicholson
- Quad Meeting
- Meeting with Cllr Khales Uddin
- Meeting with Corporate Director, Place
- Meeting with Consulate of Ecuador
- Meeting with Al Huda Mosque
- Meeting with Montefiore Centre Tenants
- Meeting with officers re. Clear Up Project
- 6 February 2018
 - London Councils Labour Group
 - London Councils Leaders Committee
 - Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum Event
 - Grants Determination Sub Committee
- 7 February 2018
 - THYSF Meeting
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Spitalfields Music meeting
- 8 February 2018
 - Meeting with Chief Executive, Swan Housing
 - Canary Wharf: 30 Years of Local Impact
 - Postal Vote Pilot
 - Mayor's Housing Meeting
 - Acid Charter visit to retailer
 - Mayor's Surgery
 - Condolence Meeting By London Bangla Press Club
- 9 February 2018
 - Spitalfields Music Open Call Showcase
- 10 February 2018
 - King Edward's Memorial Park Playground Completion & Launch
- 12 February 2018
 - Appointment Sub-Committee
 - Meeting with John Newbiggin
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Place
 - Visit to Shadwell Community Land Trust site
- 13 February 2018
 - Meeting with Max Barney Foundation
 - Meeting with Cllr Dave Chesterton
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Resources
 - Meeting with Cllr Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with officers and East End Trade Guild
 - Joint Consultative & Advisory Group (HR)
 - Meeting with officers re. CCTV Installation
 - Budget Meeting
 - Relaunch of Tower Hamlets Youth Service
- 14 February 2018
 - Meeting with Deputy Mayor for Transport
 - Meeting re. 82A Commercial Street
 - Meeting with Sha Housing Ltd
 - Meeting with Cllr Shafiqul Hoque
 - Meeting with West Ham United Foundation

- Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Mayor's Cup Grants Awards
- 15 February 2018
 - Meeting with Cllr John Pierce
 - Meeting with Docklands Community Organisation
 - Meeting with Cllr Denise Jones and Corporate Director, Adults Services
 - ITV Interview
 - Meeting with Chief Executive, THH
 - Photo: Best Bar None
 - Mayor's Surgery
 - Ask the Mayor Public Meeting, Wapping
- 16 February 2018
 - Shadwell Gardens TRA meeting
- 19 February 2018
 - Phoenix School Council Meeting
 - Meeting with Director of Business Development, Muslim Aid
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Place
 - Meeting with Chief Executive and Corporate Director, Place
 - Strategic Planning Meeting
 - Meeting with Chair of Children's Service Improvement Board (CSIB)
 - Pre-agenda Grants Determination Sub-committee
- 20 February 2018
 - Public Realm meeting
 - Quintet Meeting
 - Meeting with Cllr Amy Whitelock Gibbs and Children's Services
 - Present Petition 'Stop Racist Marches' in Tower Hamlets
 - Martyr Day event
- 21 February 2018
 - DfE Feedback Meeting
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Chief Executive and Divisional Director for Strategy, Policy and Partnership
 - Budget Full Council
- 22 February 2018
 - Introductory meeting with Business Manager & Public Realm Traffic Management
 - Corporate Induction
 - ASB Catch-up meeting with Cllr Asma Begum and Divisional Director, Community Safety
 - Visit to Young WorkPath new unit.
 - Mayor's Surgery
- 23 February 2018
 - Stepney Relief in Need Charity
 - Visit to Spitalfields Community Farm
- 25 February 2018
 - Somali Archiving Project Showcase
- 26 February 2018
 - Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation meeting

- Meeting with Chief Executive of THCVS
- Meeting with GLL
- Photo-Opportunity: Locksley A Mayoral Housing
- Meeting with the National Association of Head Teachers
- Meeting with Corporate Director, Place
- Meeting with Corporate Director, Governance
- GSCE Award Ceremony - Probashi Balagonj-Osmani Nagar Upozila Shomity
- 27 February 2018
 - Meeting with officers re. Bromley Street
 - London Job Fair
 - GMB Memorial Service for Mary Turner at St Paul's Cathedral
 - LLDC Board Meeting
 - Meeting with Cllr Amina Ali
 - Meeting with Divisional Director, Community Safety
- 28 February 2018
 - Resident Visit Baltenborough Court
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Governance
 - LBTH Prevent Peer Review
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Divisional Director, Communications and Marketing
 - Civic Centre Project Board Meeting
- 1 March 2018
 - Meeting with Whitechapel Headteachers re: Livingstone Academy objections
 - Pre Infrastructure Delivery Board meeting
 - Meeting with London Bangla Press Club
 - Interview with ATN Bangla
- 4 March 2018
 - Attended The Big Half
 - 75th Anniversary of Bethnal Green Tube Disaster
- 5 March 2018
 - Meeting with Cllr Amy Whitelock Gibbs
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Place
 - Meeting with Cllr Sirajul Islam
 - Meeting with resident
 - Meeting with Cllr Joshua Peck, Corporate Director of Place and Divisional Director of Growth & Economic Development, Employment and Enterprise
 - Shafiqur Event
- 6 March 2018
 - Meeting with Cllr Asma Begum, Corporate Director of Adult Services and Divisional Director, Community Safety
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Visit to Millwall City Farm, East End Community Foundation
 - TV One Interview
 - King George's Field Charity Board
 - Watts Grove Development meeting with residents
- 7 March 2018
 - Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Plan

- Planning Meeting
- Joint Consultative & Advisory Group (HR)
- Air Quality Partnership Board
- Meeting with Carers Association
- 8 March 2018
 - Meeting with Borough Principal of Tower Hamlets College
 - Staff Conference
 - International Women's Day event
 - Indian Suffragettes - International Women's Day event
 - Mayor's Surgery
- 9 March 2018
 - Barista Training Academy
 - Photo-opportunity: Bethnal Green Library
 - Teesdale and Hollybush TRA meeting
 - Shawnil's International Women's Day
- 10 March 2018
 - Positive East International Women's Day Event
 - Visit to the London Buddhist Centre
- 12 March 2018
 - Meeting with Chair of CSIB
 - Youth and Culture meeting
 - Meeting with Cllr Sirajul Islam and Housing department
 - Community Commissioning Co-Production Launch Event
- 13 March 2018
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Accountability Meeting with EETG members
 - Anti-Idling Event
 - Meeting with Clarion
 - Grants Determination Sub-Committee
 - Jamiatul Ummah School celebration event
 - Overview & Scrutiny
- 14 March 2018
 - Meeting with Divisional Director of Strategy, Policy and Partnership
 - Visit to Crisis Skylight
 - Free School Meals Visit
 - No Smoking Day Campaign launch
- 15 March 2018
 - Meeting with Divisional Director, Education & Partnership
 - Meeting with Ballymore
 - Meeting with officers re. THYSF update
 - Photo Opportunity for Budget & Spend on Library Books
 - Mayor's Surgery
 - Ask the Mayor Public Meeting, Bethnal Green
- 16 March 2018
 - Community Visit to Stifford Centre
 - CVS - Community Commissioning & Grants meeting
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Children's Services and Divisional Director, Youth and Commissioning
 - Meeting with Chair of CSIB

- Civic Awards Ceremony
- 17 March 2018
 - NTV Interview
- 19 March 2018
 - Launch of Your Vote is Yours Alone campaign
 - Young Work Path Launch Event
 - Meeting with residents
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Place
 - Civic Centre Project Board Pre-meet
 - Meeting with Cllr Shafiqul Hoque
 - Meeting with Weavers Community Forum
 - TH Best Value Improvement Board (Public Meeting)
- 20 March 2018
 - London Councils Labour Group
 - London Councils Leaders Committee
 - Photo-opportunity: Swan Housing
 - Quintet Meeting
 - Meeting with Cllr David Edgar and Corporate Director, Resources
 - Meeting with Cllr Denise Jones and Corporate Director, Adult Services
 - Cabinet
 - ATN Interview