

## LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

### NEW EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS

#### RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

##### **Consultation undertaken**

Before drawing up proposals for new executive arrangements, councils are required to 'take reasonable steps to consult the local government electors for, and other interested persons in, the authority's area'. The detailed form and duration of the consultation is not prescribed.

In Tower Hamlets, a full range of consultation methods and publicity was undertaken for a 12 week consultation period in line with Government guidelines, including:

- Public notices and/or editorial copy in six separate editions of East End Life, the Council's weekly newspaper which is delivered to each household in the borough;
- A 'Harmony' supplement article translating the information into major community languages;
- Press releases to promote coverage of the issue in the local media;
- A cut-out-and-return voting slip and Freepost address for written responses;
- A website survey including, for the majority of the consultation period, a link from the Council's home page;
- Posters in public buildings around the borough; and
- Letters to over 500 community, business, faith, third sector and other local organisations and partner agencies inviting their views.

The consultation material included reference to the council's provisional preference for the Leader and Cabinet model, and a prominent article in the 5th October 2009 edition of East End Life included a statement from each of the political group leaders on the council who wished to do so, setting out their respective preferred options.

The consultation opened on 30 July 2009 and closed on 22 October 2009. Set out below are the key findings and comments received.

##### **Consultation response**

The overall number of responses to the consultation was 2104, comprising 711 individual responses and a petition containing 1393 names. Information from colleagues in other authorities confirms that this figure is amongst the highest number of responses received by any London Borough on this matter, reflecting the extensive consultation undertaken and interest in the matter locally.

##### **Method of response**

Of the 711 individual responses, 331 (46.6%) were submitted via the web survey whilst 372 (52.3%) respondents completed the East End Life cut-out slip. Other responses

were received by direct e-mail (6 responses or 0.8%) and by letter (2 responses or 0.3%)

### Individual and organisational responses

Most of the responses received were from individual residents. However, **11** of the responses (i.e. 1.5% of the non-petition responses) were submitted by or on behalf of local organisations representing a wider membership.

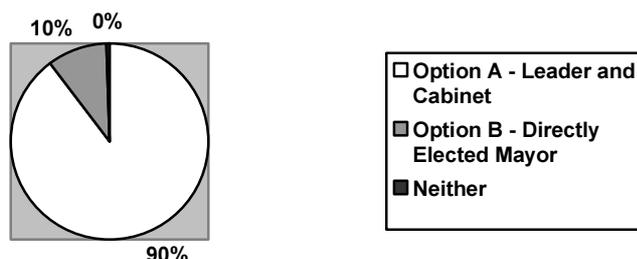
### Geographical distribution

Responses were received from residents of all parts of the borough as shown in the table below showing postcode data where available

Postal area	No. of responses	% of total (rounded)
E1	149	21.0%
E2	97	13.6%
E3	116	16.3%
E14	129	18.1%
Other/not stated	220	30.9%

### THE PREFERRED OPTION

Of the 711 individual responses, **497** favoured Option A (Leader & Cabinet) and **205** supported Option B (Mayor and Cabinet), while **9** expressed no preference or stated 'neither'. Adding in the 1393 name petition in favour of Option A, the total number of persons expressing a view was 2104, **1890** of whom supported Option A (90%) and 205 supported Option B (10%)



These figures should be considered alongside the further significant number of persons who signed the mayoral petition delivered just after the close of the consultation period.

### Comments

In addition to asking respondents to indicate their preferred option, the consultation invited any further comments. Comments received are listed below (all key points have been included but the lists have been edited where necessary to avoid excessive repetition of similar points) and a summary of the main issues raised is included in the main body of the report.

## Comments from supporters of Option 'A'

- Option A definitely preferred. Option B would provide an opportunity to an extremist to be in control and couldn't be dismissed by councillors - scary thought
- Thank you for the opportunity to express my view. I should prefer Option A due to its simplicity, good track record as it is similar to the current model, and cost - effectiveness.
- This may be the best of 2 choices - but I do have serious reservations about passing over so much power to one elected councillor eg: 4 years in office as leader - leader exclusively choosing cabinet members - leader having authority to choose between 2 and 9 members of cabinet. Seems to me to mean that leader becomes a 'professional' politician becoming even more distant from voters and residents than leader for 1 year already does when in that position. Would have preferred a third option of the current status quo so that leader for 1 year needs to make effort to remain accountable to voters - though not sure that presently happens as it is very easy to become distanced.
- I think the scrutiny powers of Council over cabinet should be strengthened, and Cabinet decisions should need ratification by Council
- I think this will give people to choose and also to have a proper democratic process for all parties to get involved who will be the leader every four years
- I feel that the Leader should only be in office for no more than three years, and that there should be two deputies.
- Option B looks like dictatorship kind of structure. This will destroy democracy. Residents will have no power to challenge the Mayor if he makes a wrong decision.
- This model has worked very well so far why change it. It is more democratic and is more likely to engage local people. It also strengthens local accountability.
- I think an elected mayor would have far too much power and would be less accountable to the electorate. LBTH already suffers from the lack accountability and we don't want this to get even worse
- The councillors have a closer knowledge on who would work best as a Leader. This could also ensure some stability in the actions proposed along the years that with option B could otherwise be jeopardized by marketing campaigns that not necessarily represent the Leaders true skills.
- Are you trying to pave the way for a BNP Mayor? Democracy means majority rule therefore majority of councillors elected to decide by the public. It's an expensive and dangerous road to go down especially as everyone knows a low turnout as is liable to happen is not representative of the people.
- I think option A is best as it continues a format that is working well enough and I don't like the idea of so much power invested in one person for such a long time - the mayor of option B.
- I am firmly of the opinion that elected Mayors are not a good thing for the community, and I set great store by the role that the ceremonial Mayor fulfils in Tower Hamlets. With such a diverse community I think that the Mayor provides cohesion, and the fact that the person filling that position changes annually means that no one community feels that their interests are being neglected. I have a high level of respect for the work of the Council in Tower Hamlets. Services seem competently and efficiently run. While I see the point of strengthening the leader's role, I would be unhappy if that meant that good collegial local government is lost.
- Even the Prime Minister can be forced to resign by his own party (albeit with some difficulty). I would choose Option B if there was some way of ensuring the Mayor would not become some sort of dictator... it's an insane system and the wrong Mayor could inflict havoc on local council business effectively delaying everything for 4 years and frustrating the democratic process. I do approve of the concept of a directly elected mayor but only once there are checks and balances in place and this proposal does not seem to accommodate that.
- I think that option A offers the best chance of the diversity within LBTH being reflected in, and influencing policing making within the council
- Do not wish to have a cabinet at all
- It is important that the Leader has the fixed term and ELBA sees this as an improvement.
- I would prefer the Leader to be elected for one year as present not four. I think it stills leaves a lot of power in the hands of one person since he is able to dismiss the cabinet at any time. How accountable is he to the electorate?
- The fact that a directly elected mayor cannot be removed from office and would serve a mandatory four-year term is a very worrying prospect indeed. It strikes me that the ability of the council to exercise its role of applying checks and balances to any decisions made by such a powerful individual would be severely impaired if this option were to be adopted. I am very strongly opposed to option B.

- This system is great, it's just like the way we elect our Prime Minister. Supporters of plan B have no credible case for it. If it's not broke, why fix it?
- Election of a Mayor will add an unnecessary layer of complexity to the democratic process. Under the current system accountability is clear and unambiguous - an elected Mayor outside the existing democratic process will blur the lines of accountability
- This option seems to be running well since 2000, why change?
- Option B is a recipe for dictatorship!
- Directly Elected Mayor leaves no role for other councillors and no reduces accountability and scrutiny.
- I don't know how many people would vote for a mayor, but most of us would not really know who we were voting for. A democratically elected council would be better placed to decide on a leader. I think that a Cabinet with only +2 members is too small, and that the minimum size should be larger - at least 5
- Look at what has happened in Newham with a directly elected mayor, no improvements
- Power shouldn't be too concentrated on one person as leaders can be good or bad. Council seems to work reasonably well as it is.
- I strongly agree that the current system is far preferable to Option B as I do not believe one person should have so much power (ie taking decisions himself / herself with no need to consult a cabinet) and not be open to challenge.
- I want to avoid ego-tripping candidates becoming mayor.
- An unnecessary further centralisation by our Labour Government.
- Have just found out about this consultation by accident - it clearly hasn't been advertised properly and I would question the legitimacy of any result.
- I do not see the need to change the system at all and am disappointed not to see an option c) maintain the status quo. If I must choose between the two options given it must be b).
- In a diverse borough such as this power needs to be more diffused not less. No one figure could claim to be properly representative of all the communities and would risk being put, or being perceived to be put, under undue pressure to favour their own or their supporters. We don't need high profile personality politics but solid hard work to consolidate the hard won progress of the last 14 years.
- We already have a mayor for London. Secondly, a mayor at this level is too much officialdom for what is essentially an administrative role. However, it should be noted that the council with its current leader has made a poor response to the noise issue from London City Airport.
- It's dangerous to put total power in the hands of just one person in a borough like ours.
- I believe that this is the fairest structure and electing a mayor for a 4 year term is dangerous.
- I've seen what the effect has been in Newham and I don't want it Tower Hamlets. An elected Mayor is a Chief Executive by another name and we don't need both.
- It has been a disaster in Newham with local councillors being sidelined and almost a dictator managed Council. Not a good road to down as it cannot be undone.
- I think it would be a mistake to put someone in a position of power that can make decisions on their own and cannot be removed for 4 years. Imagine, the people vote for someone inappropriate and next thing the council coffers are empty and the borough would be in an enormous mess.
- It is important that the Leader is subject to some checks and balances, such as being removeable by the vote of the whole Council. This offsets the ability of the Leader to dismiss the Cabinet and govern autocratically. A directly elected Mayor would offer some advantages, but his powers would seem to be nearly untrammelled and there are insufficient safeguards in this proposal. Given the historically low turnout at local government elections, the ability to remove the Mayor every four years is an advantage more apparent than real.
- STRONGLY prefer this option. A mayor could be a disaster for TH. BTW I'm not affiliated to any party - just don't want the borough to be used for showboating by ambitious people looking to use it for their own ends.
- Option A seems to offer the more consistently democratic option on a day to day basis (assuming that councillors listen to us and not just pursue party lines - which indirectly gives us a B option!)
- I would be very opposed to having a directly elected Mayor and cabinet. It puts too much power in the hands of one person. I believe a system where there are more checks and balances would be in the best interests of the local population.
- Much prefer the checks and balances of this system.
- Seems like a bad idea to give one person power for four years as option B would seem to do.
- Please no mayor - too much power

- This seems to be a more fair and democratic system, and more responsive to checks and balances, which we need more of. No demagogues in Tower Hamlets please!
- I would prefer the checks and balances of a leader and cabinet, elected by the whole council.
- Having a mayor polarises the situation and makes jockeying for position a major part of all policy. I think it will reduce the level of service that the council can provide.
- I believe a directly elected mayor puts too much power in the hands of one person or electorate

## Comments from supporters of Option 'B'

- Prefer to elect my Mayor. Why do we need a ceremonial Mayor? The councillors should take his role.
- From my experience of Hackney Council which has a directly elected mayor I think that this system creates stronger answerability and connection between electorate and mayor.
- I think Option B may provide more a cohesive Tower Hamlets Council and provide a clearer sense of policy and priority direction over each 4-year council term.
- Suggestion: A: The entire candidate has to have political education and understanding of local community value. B: independent interview procedure to become councillor, mayor or Council leader.
- Option B removes any doubt of cronyism within the council cabinet
- Option A gives too much direct power to the Council Leader and disenfranchises the Tower Hamlets electorate
- As this is such an important issue you should be promoting this far more visibly. I only happened to see this in the Eastend life on page 23 it should be on the front page and you should have posters out etc. You only have to look across to Hackney to see how well a directly elected Mayor can be. They have kept all their rubbish, recycling and housing services in house and are on target to becoming an excellent service. Having a directly elected mayor means he they can control priorities and hold employees and council members to account more effectively.
- I am strongly in favour of a directly elected Mayor and Cabinet. This would give residents a say on who runs their Council. A fully-paid Mayor is also more likely to dedicate appropriate time and attention to the issues arising. From my experience, Councillors have to rely on their day job and can only spend so much time and attention to Council matters. I do not think the current model works and would like to see it changed to a Directly Elected Mayor and Cabinet.
- Would like to see directly accountable mayor but with recall powers available within four year term if performance is not up to scratch, as happens in some US states
- I feel that a directly elected mayor selected by the residents of Tower Hamlets will allow the local population a say in who leads the council based on what the mayor and the cabinet can actually do for the borough by way of setting out a manifesto and then allowing the residents to decide if the person who should be mayor has the most appropriate policies for all of the borough, ideally the cabinet should be able to be recalled and re-elected by the people if they appear to be not performing to the agreed standard and delivering the policies they were elected on.
- I'm concerned that a matter of importance such as this has been poorly advertised and there are no direct links from the home page nor is it listed on the Council & Democracy page. It is unlikely that a resident who wasn't specifically looking for the consultation would come across this issue and therefore would be unable to voice their opinion. A cynic might suspect this is intentional
- This is the best option as it involves people in choosing someone to represent them and best suit someone who does not belong to any political party. Option a can play a part in this option too. four year mayor and four year leader & cabinet
- Real direct democracy is power in the hands of the electorate, not elected Councillors. Furthermore, I would like elected Councillors to proactively hold the Mayor to account and not just agree with him because a fellow Councillor fills the position.
- Having a directly elected Mayor with executive powers increases accountability and transparency
- Let the people decide But NO postal votes should be allowed we are aware that this process is open to corruption so one vote one person and it should not be a political party just the best for the borough.
- I thought your notice in East End Life was unfairly prejudiced against the option of a directly elected mayor. You mentioned the seven-year old example of Hartlepool's 'H'Angus the Monkey', but not neighbouring Hackney's much more positive experience of the system.
- This will put the power in the hands of the people. I just wish that the information provided should be clear enough to let people know that elected officers can be removed by the people that voted them into power. It is not fair when we are being given half baked information, on whose benefit, I really do not know.

- A directly elected Mayor works well for London as a whole. I believe it would work well for the Borough.
- The mayoral system works well in Hackney and provides clearer decisions and accountability for local people.
- I really would like to see a directly elected mayor and the cabinet, because I feel this way, it's truly represent the public.
- Having a directly accountable leader of the council would give people in tower hamlets a chance to express their views on how the council is run in a tangible way. This would be a positive step towards re-engaging residents who feel their voices are not being heard. The council may or may not be doing a good job, however, residents pay the council tax and therefore like any "paying customer" should have the right to change leader if they feel they are not being served adequately.
- Directly elected mayor would work best for Tower Hamlets.
- What is the proposed cost for this to be implemented? I would like to see the entire council operation reduced. Get rid of the nannying and concentrate on the basics please.
- It is important that residents choose the mayor
- Greater focus on local issues with more accountability. Also the most competent group of people may get the opportunity to do what's best for the whole borough. Rather than be limited to the people of any specific party many of whom are incompetent
- I am honoured to have been asked.
- Direct election is fairer and involves local people.
- I think this is a fairer method and will hopefully mean that the council is not just self selecting it's 'own' as the fear is great that this has happened already in the borough.
- I think the system needs to be observed for the 1st and 2nd term and if problem arises then we can go back to the old system. We also must ensure the Mayor is accountable and is not able to misuse his power in anyway.
- A chief executive model seems fairer and more likely to deliver as opposed to amateur politicians at local level.
- We should have a say on who will be our mayor, I don't even seem to know who it is at the moment...
- This is the best and most accountable way to involve and have accountability in the general public.
- I believe that the Directly-elected Mayor model will lead to stronger governance in Tower Hamlets because the Mayor is easily identifiable and provides a clear focus for community engagement, accountability and leadership.