

Mayor's Report to Council

13th November 2019

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

This report is published during the pre-election period where guidelines and restrictions on publicity apply.

Key Events/Announcements

Remembrance Sunday

As always a number of events were held across the borough to mark Remembrance Sunday, honouring the service and sacrifice made by so many during the two world wars and subsequent conflicts.

A big thank you to everyone who was involved in arranging these events and for the work they do throughout the year.

General Election

The election campaign is now well underway and I would like to thank in advance the council's elections team, other members of staff and the volunteers who work tirelessly to ensure that the election runs smoothly in the borough, particularly given the short notice that there would be an election at all.

As a council, like every local authority across the UK, we will be watching the result very closely to understand what it means for us and for everyone living in our borough.

This is a defining moment for our country for so many reasons. The result will shape our country for years to come – our approach to Brexit, our commitment to public services and our appetite to tackle the climate crisis – and regardless of your views it is absolutely crucial that everyone's voice is heard.

The deadline to register to vote is midnight on Tuesday 26th November 2019 and I would urge everyone to play their part in ensuring that people are registered to vote: <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

Budget

Work on the council's budget continues and – without getting into the politics of it during a pre-election period – some very difficult decisions lie ahead.

Tower Hamlets Council has worked hard to make £190 million in savings since 2010, however because of the current funding situation and other growing financial pressures we still have to save an extra £39 million by 2023. As many of the more straightforward savings have already been done, the choices we face in the future are much tougher.

The longer term funding position from government remains uncertain and with only a one year financial settlement for next year, we are expecting the so called 'Fair Funding Review' to result in further cuts to our budget in the future. The Brexit deadlock and the snap general election have meant that the usual guidance and certainty we receive from the government have been missed. This has made it far harder to plan, as we usually do, for a three year budget and places further uncertainty on the future.

Despite the challenges we face, we are proud to have continued to invest in frontline services and we currently have the seventh lowest council tax in London.

We have launched a consultation to hear the views of residents, businesses and community organisations to help shape the council's budget and council tax rate for 2020/21. The six-week consultation runs until midday on Thursday 5 December:

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/council_and_democracy/Your_borough_your_future/Your_borough_your_future.aspx

Brexit

Brexit is clearly a major concern for us as a council and we have taken measures to prepare the borough for the UK's departure from the European Union, should it happen. We must wait for the result of the general election to guide our next steps, significantly adding to the uncertainty that councils across the country are facing.

Black History Month

The council held a wide range of fantastic events as part of Black History Month. We are proud of our diversity in Tower Hamlets and I'm grateful to everyone who worked on the event programme and everyone who was involved and/or attended any of the events.

Liveable Streets

Work continues on our Liveable Streets programme – a £15m project which aims to improve the look and feel of public spaces in neighbourhoods across the borough, making it easier, safer and more convenient to get around by foot, bike and public transport.

We are currently consulting residents in the Bethnal Green area on their views on proposals to prevent cars using residential roads as rat-runs and improve air quality and road safety as well as tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. Traffic diversions will be accompanied by improvements to pavements and green spaces as part of the Liveable Streets project which will be rolled out in 17 areas across the borough.

The last chance to have your say is Monday 25 November – more details here:

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/community_and_living/Liveable_Streets.aspx

Parental Leave for councillors

As members' will be aware, Councillor Mufeedah Bustin is now on maternity leave and we send our very warmest wishes to her and her family. I would like her role as Mayoral Adviser to be covered during this time, as our council policy allows.

It's worth noting that our council was one of the very first to introduce arrangements for parental leave for councillors. It's unfortunate that the outdated law requires us to formally agree a report to enable maternity leave for a period longer than 6 months, and this is something that we might want to take up as a council.

London City Airport consultation

The council has now formally responded to the consultation and this builds on our debate at the previous full council meeting. This is an important matter for many of our residents and I hope that our response adequately conveys their views. My cover note to the consultation response is available at:

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/London_City_Airport_Consultation_Response.pdf

Universal Credit & the Child Poverty Action Group

The council has established a multi-million pound Tackling Poverty Fund and we use a significant amount of this fund to provide urgent advice and support for those transitioning onto Universal Credit.

As part of our tackling poverty work, we commissioned the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) to undertake some research looking at the impact of universal credit (UC) on families in the borough.

Their qualitative research study between October 2018 and July 2019 found, among other things, that:

- a. 79% of responses included some negative sentiment about universal credit;
- b. The transition to Universal Credit has been problematic, and that claimants found making and managing claims using the online system difficult;
- c. Claimants often had problems with Universal Credit payments, finding they varied and were often miscalculated or unexpectedly stopped;
- d. Stakeholders highlighted the monthly payment system, Advance Payment Arrangements and deductions as problematic for claimants;
- e. Claimants and stakeholders had negative experiences of JobCentrePlus (JCP) and interactions with the DWP. "A lack of support, training and awareness among JCP staff seems to have resulted in an absence of dignity for claimants, while stakeholders complained of poor communications with the DWP";
- f. Many claimants were struggling to get by with the amount of universal credit they received, and were in debt and arrears as a result of being on universal credit. This is exacerbated by the system of payment in arrears and the five-week wait at the start of claims;

g. Universal credit was seen to have had a negative impact on children.

These findings emphasises many concerns we already had and we're looking very closely at the recommendations that CPAG have made.

CPAG's report is available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/worse-impact-universal-credit-families-tower-hamlets>

Tower Hamlets Council has recently been ranked joint third in London for continuing to tackle food poverty for vulnerable residents in the borough, in the annual Beyond the Food Bank report, part of Sustain's London Food Poverty Campaign.

Local Community Fund

Cabinet agreed our new Local Community Fund (LCF) in July which replaces the old Mainstream Grants Programme (MSG). The LCF means an investment of £2.7m p/a for the next three years in over 50 excellent community groups across the borough.

We would have loved to support every strong bid we received for the Fund but there were £10m worth of bids for the £2.7m annual pot. Because of this, Cabinet also agreed a number of transitional arrangements for organisations there were funded under MSG that will not be funded under the new LCF, and an action plan to mitigate the impact of the change on people with protected characteristics.

A report was brought to the council's cabinet meeting at the end of last month updating members on the mitigations in place and I'm pleased to see work progressing in this area. The LCF is an excellent boost to community and voluntary groups in the borough but it's absolutely right that we support those organisations that were unsuccessful in bidding.

Living Wage Week

It's Living Wage Week this week and the new rate for 2019/20 has been announced this week as £10.75 for London (the new UK rate has been announced as £9.30). The Living Wage Foundation's campaign has ensured hundreds of thousands of workers earn a wage they can live on, and we are proud to support their campaign – Tower Hamlets Council is itself a Living Wage accredited organisation.

Central Foundation

I'm pleased that the Crown Prosecution Service has announced an individual has been charged in relation to the incident where young Muslim school girls were filmed outside Central Foundation School.

I was appalled when I saw this Islamophobic and racist video.

Tower Hamlets is a No Place for Hate borough and this video was totally unacceptable. Nobody should have to stand for abhorrent racist or Islamophobic abuse, least of all our children.

Individual Mayoral Decisions taken since last meeting

None taken.

Engagements and Meetings - 19 September to 13 November 2019

19 September 2019

- Maltings and Brewster meeting
- Bow Ward Issues
- Osmani Centre
- Tower Hamlets Partnership
- Stoptober Photo Event
- Mayor's casework surgery
- Fourcorners Annual Reception

20 September 2019

- New Town Hall Time Capsule Ceremony
- Isle of Dogs South Poplar area board
- Tour of Poplar Court

21 September 2019

- CBPA Eid Celebrations
- Labour Party Conference - London Labour Party Regional Reception
- Labour Party Conference - Canary Wharf Group PLC First Night Labour Conference Dinner

22 September 2019

- Car Free Day promotion

23 September 2019

- Labour Party Conference - The City of London Corporation Dinner Labour Party Conference

25 September 2019

- Children, Schools and Young Peoples Portfolio meeting
- Planning, Air Quality and Tackling Poverty Portfolio meeting
- Meeting with Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Mayor's Advisory Board
- Cabinet Meeting
- Resident Meeting

26 September 2019

- Chisenhale Gallery
- Bethnal Green Liveable Streets
- Assets meeting
- DD Planning & Building Control candidate discussions
- St. Pauls Way Celebration of Completion of Scheme
- British Bangladeshi Power & Inspiration Summer Party

27 September 2019

- Welcome Service for the Bishop of Stepney

30 September 2019

- Thames Tideway Chief Executive
- Meeting with Cllr Akhtar and Divisional Director Arts Parks and Events
- Divisional Director Housing and Regeneration
- Corporate Director, Governance, Asmat Hussain
- Resident Visit
- Public Meeting on the Boundary Estate
- Inauguration & Graduation Ceremony of Beanibazar Thana Jonokollan Shomitee UK

1 October 2019

- LLDC Transition Leaders Meeting
- **Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods Poplar Harca**
- Pre meet - Regeneration Board
- Cllr Asma Begum
- Community Safety & Equalities Portfolio Meeting
- Strategic Forward Planning Meeting
- DD, Planning and Major Programmes candidate discussions
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee

2 October 2019

- Resources Portfolio Meeting
- Housing Portfolio Meeting
- Political Cabinet
- Mayor's Advisory Board
- Regeneration Meeting
- New City College Annual Student Awards Evening

3 October 2019

- Meeting with Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Licensed Taxi Drivers' Association
- DD, Property and Major Programmes Final Interviews
- Mayor's casework surgery
- Thai boxing fighters academy AGM

4 October 2019

- LBTH Local Biodiversity Action Plan launch
- Brick Lane 1978 The Turning Point event

6 October 2019

- UKBCCI Business and Entrepreneur Excellence Awards and Gala Dinner 2019

7 October 2019

- DD, Planning and Building Control candidate discussions
- Divisional Director Strategy, Policy and Performance
- Leaside Partnership Board
- London Unison meeting
- Durga Puja

8 October 2019

- London Councils Labour Group

- London Councils Leaders' Committee Meeting
- Mini-Holland meeting with Cllr Clyde Loakes
- Adults, Health & Wellbeing Portfolio Meeting
- Culture, Arts & Brexit Portfolio Meeting
- Mayor's Crime & ASB Board

9 October 2019

- Work and Economic Growth Portfolio Meeting
- Regeneration Project Board
- City Fringe Area Board
- Environment Portfolio Meeting
- Parking Policy meeting
- Mayor's Advisory Board
- Traffic Meeting
- Meeting about Old Willow Close gypsy and traveller site

10 October 2019

- Central London Forward Board Meeting
- Chief Executive and Borough Commander
- Meeting with Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Shahporan Mosque Meeting
- THCVS AGM & Conference
- Mayor's casework surgery

11 October 2019

- Training

14 October 2019

- CPAG Launch Event
- National Democracy week event
- Hate Crime
- Chief Executive Tower Hamlets Homes
- Tower Hamlets Peace Walk

15 October 2019

- Divisional Director Planning and Building Control final interviews
- National Democracy Week event
- Meeting with Chief Executive Will Tuckley

16 October 2019

- Cllr John Pierce
- Planning Meeting
- All Members' Seminar - Resilient Groups, Interpersonal and Group Cohesion
- Mayors Political Cabinet
- Mayor's Advisory Board
- Cllr Sirajul Islam
- Oxford House's official reopening

17 October 2019

- Old Ford Homes
- Corporate Induction
- Divisional Director of Marketing and Communications

- Property Meeting
- Corporate Director, Place, Ann Sutcliffe
- Mayor's casework surgery

18 October 2019

- A13 Ramp Opening with Mayor of Newham

19 October 2019

- Labour Group Away Day

21 October 2019

- Meeting with HR
- Young Mayor Ahmed Duale
- Cllr Mufeedah Bustin
- Divisional Director, Public Realm
- Labour Group Executive Committee
- Labour Group meeting

22 October 2019

- National Association of Regional Employers
- Ribbon Cutting Event - Tower Hill Terrace

23 October 2019

- Howard Dawber Canary Wharf Group
- Cllr David Edgar
- Parking policy meeting
- Scrutiny Challenge Session - Community Safety
- Liveable Streets
- Meeting with Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Children, Schools & Young People Portfolio Meeting

24 October 2019

- Meeting with Sadiq Khan's office
- Greater London Provincial Council AGM
- Somali Senior Citizens Club Meeting
- Locksley D site meeting
- Mayor's casework surgery

26 October 2019

- Somali Week Festival

27 October 2019

- Bangladeshi Curry Awards

28 October 2019

- Executive Director of English National Ballet
- Slough Governance Review briefing
- Meeting with Stifford Centre
- Independent Scrutineer for Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Pre-meet Tower Hamlets Citizens Mayoral Assembly
- Meeting with TfL re. Hackney to Isle of Dogs cycle route
- Overview and Scrutiny

29 October 2019

- Civil Resilience Training for Leaders and Directly Elected Mayors
- Strategic Forward Planning Meeting
- Foundation for Future London
- Big Ride for Palestine
- Ask the Mayor

30 October 2019

- Liveable Streets video recording
- 14 to 25 Partnership Annual Conference
- Baroness D'Souza re. holiday hunger
- Political Cabinet
- Public Realm Strategic
- Cabinet
- ELBA 30th Anniversary event

31 October 2019

- Planning, Air Quality and Tackling Poverty
- Meeting with Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Q2 Performance and budget monitoring meeting - Adults, Health and Wellbeing
- Mayor's casework surgery

01 November 2019

- Launch of Roman Road West/Globe Town Regeneration Programme

02 November 2019

- TH Governors Annual Conference

03 November 2019

- Tower Hamlets Fireworks

04 November 2019

- Official Launch of Welcome guide to the Borough for New Migrants
- Q2 Performance and budget monitoring meeting - Culture, Art and Brexit
- HR meeting
- Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance
- Meeting with Sir Steve Bullock re. improvement and transformation board
- Q2 Performance and budget monitoring meeting - Environment
- Jolly Green visit

05 November 2019

- Ann Lucas, Chair of Tower Hamlets Homes Board
- Meeting regarding grants process
- Q2 Performance and budget monitoring meeting - Housing
- Q2 Performance and budget monitoring meeting - Children, Schools and Young People
- Q2 Performance and budget monitoring meeting - Community Safety and Equalities
- Tower Hamlets Mayoral Citizens Assembly

06 November 2019

- Meeting with New City College
- Resources Portfolio meeting
- Traffic Meeting
- Q2 Performance and budget monitoring meeting - Resources
- Q2 Performance and budget monitoring meeting - Work and Economic growth
- Environment Portfolio Meeting
- Mayor's Advisory Board
- Grants Determination Sub-Committee
- Public meeting

07 November 2019

- Liveable Streets – Wapping Consultation Proposals
- Metropolitan Housing Association
- Meeting with Chief Executive Will Tuckley

08 November 2019

- 10th year Anniversary Sunna musk

10 November 2019

- Remembrance Day Tower Hill
- Fenchuanj Kallyan Shamiti UK inauguration Ceremony

11 November 2019

- Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation
- Regeneration Board pre-meeting
- Debate with Young Mayor's Team

12 November 2019

- Tower Hamlets Education Partnership
- Cllr Sirajul Islam
- Kemnal Park Proposal Decision
- Tideway
- Emmott House Update
- Market Trader Meeting
- Community Safety & Equalities Portfolio
- Culture, Arts & Brexit Portfolio
- British Bangladeshi Who is Who 2019

13 November 2019

- Divisional Director Education and Partnerships
- Cllr Motin Uz Zaman
- Planning Meeting
- Divisional Director Arts, Parks and Events
- Mayor's Advisory Board
- Divisional Director Customer Access
- Pre-Council Labour Group
- Council