

### **11.1 Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed**

With the disproportionate impact of Covid on Black and Asian communities how is the Council supporting these communities to stay safe?

#### **Response from Deputy Mayor for Community Safety, Youth and Equalities, Cllr Asma Begum:**

Studies and statistics have shown the impact of covid-19 to disproportionately affect the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

While the LBTH Outbreak Control plan set out our response to the coronavirus pandemic, including a community engagement strategy (which is also available on the council website), we have gone further by engaging directly with community groups, as well as commissioning grassroots community groups to work with our Black and Asian residents, namely our Somali and Bangladeshi communities.

We are also working with these community groups in faith settings to promote covid-19 guidance and on the test and trace programme.

We are also working with THCVS to establish a supporting programme of work on the structural inequality factors as part of the Covid recovery. And finally, we have been using our Covid-19 community champions platform to hear from the community on this issue and amplify those voices locally.

Tower Hamlets is one of the most diverse boroughs in London and we are committed to reducing the spread of the virus to our residents, including our most vulnerable.

### **11.2 Question from Councillor Peter Golds**

In light of the proposed closure of Cubitt Town library, a number of residents are proposing a joint venture with the council for the premises to be used for library, communal and educational purposes to be organised by volunteers with assistance from the council. Will the Mayor meet with residents to discuss this proposal?

#### **Response from Mayor John Biggs:**

There will be a public consultation about the future of Cubitt Town library running from 23 November to 29 January.

As part of this, local residents, organisations, businesses and stakeholders will be able to express their views and we will encourage suggestions for alternative ways of providing library services on the Isle of Dogs, in addition to the Canary Wharf Idea Store.

It's possible that one of the suggestions coming out of the consultation will be along the lines you describe and it's something we could consider if this was the case.

Similar community-based models exist in other local authorities, but it and it does not always bring the expected outcomes. One risk is that is that after some initial enthusiasm volunteers fade away and the quality of the service can suffer.

In principle, we are open to the idea if there is an appetite for in the community but at this point it's best to wait until the end of the consultation.

### **11.3 Question from Councillor Kyrsten Perry**

Can the cabinet member provide an update on the Barkantine Liveable Streets scheme?

#### **Response from Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (job share), Cllr Dan Tomlinson:**

I'm pleased to say that that the works at Malabar Street are now complete.

The next phase of works, starting on the 23rd November are the street lighting, raised tables and new crossing points on the Quarterdeck. Residents should receive notification letters this week.

In early December works will start on Tiller Road and Mellish Street, including footway widening, traffic calming and the changes to the one-way system.

One-way changes will then follow in Strafford Street and Alpha Grove in early 2021.

Proposals around Cuba Street and Byng Street have been delayed and have not been programmed due to the impact of the large housing developments that are currently being built on these streets. We will continue to liaise with developers to align future works.

### **11.4 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood**

How can the Council help to ensure that Working from Home does not become a direct threat to the economy of Tower Hamlets, what can we do to encourage workers to return to their offices in 2021?

#### **Response from Mayor John Biggs:**

As the Government guidance makes very clear, everyone who can work effectively from home should do so.

Where people cannot do so – including for example people who work in construction, or manufacturing, or indeed providing essential services to others that require physical presence – they should continue to travel to their workplace in a safe manner.

Clearly this advice will be revisited as the situation develops.

The impact of Covid-19 on our national and local economy has been enormous, as the recent employment statistics show. And it has been particularly devastating on areas such as ours which depend on public transport, where much normal life involves large numbers of people in close proximity, and large numbers also work in service industries.

As a council we have an important role to play in working with business-owners, landlords and transport operators to ensure that workers are safe.

Through our work with others, in particular at Central London Forward, our sub-regional partnership with 11 other Central London Councils, we have highlighted and lobbied on the pressures this has caused our area.

As well as supporting the development of spaces and encouraging affordable workspace provision to maximise the number of jobs in the borough, we are encouraging new business investment and new business growth.

Given the impact of the anticipated business rate rebase will be huge to our budget, perhaps the Tory Group could raise this as an urgent concern with their colleagues in Government.

We do an enormous amount of work with employers in our borough, and with residents through WorkPath, and I'm very proud of the work we do locally. We also know that this is an extremely difficult time for everyone and so I want to assure Cllr Wood that this is something we are taking very seriously.

### **11.5 Question from Councillor Amina Ali**

How is the Council tackling loneliness?

#### **Response from Deputy Mayor for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Rachel Blake:**

Thank you for your question and for the work you're doing in your role as Mayoral Adviser for Mental Health, and to Cllr Denise Jones for all her work as Older People's Champion.

The Loneliness task force is working to several key themes to address the loneliness and social isolation which has been such a focus during the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Raising awareness of loneliness and its causes
- Building on and fully utilising the community assets that we already have
- Supporting and enabling people to be actively involved in shaping and delivering local action on loneliness
- Taking a strategic approach on loneliness

The task force is developing a Wellbeing Toolkit to help staff of the Council and partners to support people that are feeling isolated and disengaged with practical help.

This is such an important area, particularly during the lockdown, and it's something we're taking very seriously.

### **11.6 Question from Councillor Bex White**

Can the Lead Member please provide an update on the work of the Social Work Academy and progress in ensuring a stable workforce in Children's Social Care?

#### **Response from Cabinet Member for Children and schools, Cllr Danny Hassell:**

Our Social Work Academy is a way of ensuring that we are recruiting, retaining and developing outstanding social workers.

This is so important as it means we can bring the best talent to help us achieve excellent outcomes for our children and young people.

The Social Work Academy continues to deliver increasingly stable Social Work staffing in Children's Social Care through:

- Leading work on both recruitment and retention, with our retention rates much better than the London benchmark;
- additional support structures for those in their first, second and third years of practice;
- developing the practice model for the borough;
- leading innovation projects;
- and deepening a model of collaborative quality assurance.

The data shows a real success story through 2020 on both recruitment and retention.

This is supporting the continued improvement of our service, which really benefits our children and young people, whilst also delivering financial savings.

### **11.7 Question from Councillor Dipa Das**

Will the Cabinet Member set out how the Tower Hamlets Free School Meal scheme is different to the national scheme and what we do to tackle holiday hunger?

#### **Response from Cabinet Member for Planning and Social Inclusion (job share), Cllr Mufeedah Bustin:**

Tower Hamlets Free School meal scheme in Primary Schools differs from the National Scheme in that in addition to Universal Infant Free School Meals, the Mayor funds Free School Meals for all pupils in KS2/Junior School that are not eligible for Free School Meals.

This means 100% of pupils in Tower Hamlets Primary Schools receive a Free School Meal. Tower Hamlets is one of the very few Councils to deliver this benefit to all children in primary school.

Across each holiday since Easter the Council has arranged midday meal collection sites at a range of locations across the borough. This scheme has not been limited to children in receipt of free school meals, but open to those who need it, as we know that a number of households who are not currently eligible have been suffering as a result of the pandemic. This has been funded from the Tackling Poverty budget and from the donation of meals.

We distributed approximately 11,000 meals at Easter, over 2600 in May half term, over 32,000 in Summer and approximately 2,000 in October half term.

With the announcement of government funding for the Christmas holidays we are currently planning how we will deliver a service at that time.

### **11.8 Question from Councillor Marc Francis**

Will the Lead Member for Public Realm Services update me on when he expects the barriers in Roman Road market erected to facilitate social distancing at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic to be removed so that market traders can return to their traditional pitches?

#### **Response from Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (job share), Cllr Dan Tomlinson:**

There is currently no date set to remove the barriers that facilitate wider footways on Roman Road, but this is something that is being kept under review.

Social distancing guidelines are that people from different households should be 2 metres apart from people you do not live with where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings or increasing ventilation indoors) and this means that additional pedestrian space is required on Roman Road to facilitate this.

Our officers from Highways & Transport and the Street Markets section regularly review the situation with respect to the market and are satisfied that the current arrangement should be retained.

I'd be very happy to discuss this with you in more detail if it would be helpful.

### **11.9 Question from Councillor Victoria Obaze**

What has the Council done to prepare for health and wellbeing this winter?

#### **Response from Deputy Mayor for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Rachel Blake:**

It's so important that we, as a council and working together with health partners across different agencies, do everything we can to tackle Covid-19, particularly as this phase comes during winter where there is even more pressure on services.

The Council has developed its adult social care winter plan, in collaboration with partners including the CCG. This sets out what steps the Council is taking over winter and was signed off by Cabinet last month. The plan is available on the council's website.

Our plan is comprehensive, including setting out how we continue to provide support to care homes, supporting providers and council staff to access and use PPE, monitor national testing arrangements for care homes, and looking at how we can work with voluntary and community sector partners.

I'd also like to take this moment to thank everyone who is involved in this huge effort, from care workers and other healthcare staff through to our own council staff, and individuals and families following the rules to keep each other safe.

#### **11.10 Question from Councillor Shad Chowdhury**

How has the council supported small businesses during the pandemic?

#### **Response from Cabinet Member for Work and Economic Growth, Cllr Motin Uz-Zaman:**

It's been a really difficult year for businesses but I'm proud of the work that council's done to support the borough's vibrant small business sector.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the council has distributed over £182million in grants to small businesses.

Our officers have handled enquiries and supported small businesses to access the range of government financial support available, including:

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
- Business Rate Relief
- Self-employment Income Support Scheme
- Business Support Grants
- Bounce-back & Business Interruption Loans

Our recently launched 'Pivot Project' pilot is providing expert advice and grant funding to 50 Tower Hamlets small businesses to help them adapt their businesses to the current climate.

On Hackney Wick & Fish Island, the Council has delivered the 'Wick Together' project which has directly supported creative freelance businesses.

We have set up a project enabling small retailers to establish delivery services during and beyond lockdown periods.

Finally, beyond council projects, officers are working with a range of stakeholders via the 'Silver Business Support Group' to develop further initiatives to support local businesses.

#### **11.11 Question from Councillor Kahar Chowdhury**

Can the lead member provide an update on the future of Hackney Road Hostel and the support plans in place for current and future residents?

#### **Response from Deputy Mayor for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Rachel Blake:**

From April, Hackney Road Hostel is proposed to be a part of the Council's broader support to rough sleepers and the homeless who have been accommodated through

the first wave of Covid19. This will be funded by MHCLG. Existing residents of Hackney Road have individual support plans to identify their needs and appropriate accommodation to move on before this date, and they are being supported by Hackney Road and the Housing Options team.

### **11.12 Question from Councillor Val Whitehead**

Can the Lead Member please update on the work of the council in supporting children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and ensuring services meet their needs?

#### **Response from Cabinet Member for Children and schools, Cllr Danny Hassell:**

The Integrated Early Years service supports children with ASD, and their families to access services including speech and language, social and emotional needs and to support development of self-care.

Phoenix Special School plays a key role in autism support and is commissioned by the council to provide specialist ASD guidance and training to schools and families. It is judged Outstanding by Ofsted and identified as a “Centre of Excellence” by the National Autistic Society.

The council is opening a new mainstream primary school resource base for ASD in September 2021. This will complement the two ASD Phoenix School satellites – Marnar Primary and Bow Secondary.

For children requiring more specialist provision, the number of places at Phoenix has increased over the past three years, reaching 450 places in September 2021. This has been supported by £18m investment of capital and an additional £2m in top-up funding.

We have supported the Phoenix Autism Trust to open post-19 educational provision for 50 young people so students with ASD can attend specialist provision until age 25. And the council has worked with Phoenix to develop strong partnerships with local employers.

Families can also access short breaks and respite through the Children with Disabilities service.

### **11.13 Question from Councillor Abdal Ullah**

Can the Mayor confirm that Wapping residents with blue badge will have exception from Busgate & clarify when this will start.

#### **Response from Mayor John Biggs:**

As a council we have to balance a growing population and the need for people to use vehicles with preventing congestion and tackling our poor air quality.

We have looked carefully at the impact of the bus gate.

I have agreed that all Blue Badge holders living in Wapping (south of The Highway) will be allowed to register one vehicle for a permit to use the bus gate during operational hours.

All those residents concerned will shortly be receiving a letter advising of how they can apply for this permit as well as it being advertised on the Parking website.

As soon as a resident receives confirmation of the permit, they will be able to use the gate.

#### **11.14 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan**

Could the Mayor confirm whether he is planning to close the well-used local swimming facility St George's Pools?

#### **Response from Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit, Cllr Sabina Akhtar:**

We have no plans to close St George's Pool at this time.

But it is important to note, that the changes in the leisure market exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic means that the borough's leisure centres are reviewed on a monthly basis.

This review includes an analysis of financial viability, health & safety risk assessments, provision of community activities and activating additional areas within each centre, which may currently be closed.

The current national lockdown from 5th November to 2nd December will have a further adverse financial impact on the borough's leisure centres and this impact on each of our centres will need to be assessed.

Sports and leisure centres form a key part of Tower Hamlets' commitment to providing a healthy borough. Therefore, any major changes to our leisure centres will be made public.