

Appendix A

Written Responses to Member Questions not put at the 20th January 2021 Council Meeting

11.1 Question from Councillor Dipa Das:

In light of the school closures, can the cabinet member provide an update on how the council is supporting home learning and access to digital technology?

Response from Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children and Schools:

Ensuring children and families are supported to learn at home is a key priority of schools and the council.

The Tower Hamlets Education Partnership has analysed pupil gaps in learning arising from the first lockdown to inform targeting of resources and to providing advice on challenges identified by schools.

Officers are rolling out the national laptop programme which is targeted to specific pupils identified by the government including pupils in year 10, where we have distributed laptops to 525 children, and pupils with a social worker, with 2022 laptops allocated, over half over which have been distributed so far.

Many schools have bought and distributed laptops and this has been supported by local organisations, for example, the partnership between Poplar Harca, LETTA and East End Community Foundation has provided laptops for a number of schools in the Poplar area. THEP has also been developing relationships with the business sector, resulting in donations of £30k of IT kit for schools, so far, with more to follow. There are other local initiatives by charities who are sourcing and distributing equipment.

Zoom sessions are also being held for parents and, importantly, safeguarding guidance and training on home learning has been provided to school staff and shared with unions.

11.7 Question from Councillor Bex White:

I've had excellent feedback from residents about the improvements to Bartlett Park, and it's certainly well-used. Can the Cabinet Member for Environment please update us on progress on adding in additional Zebra Crossings on Upper North Street to make it safer for children using the park?

Response from Councillor Dan Tomlinson – Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (Job Share) - Lead on Public Realm:

Officers are aware of the road danger issues on Upper North Street, particularly traffic speeds and lack of pedestrian crossings developing and have received correspondence from residents on this matter. Highways & Transport and Parks & Open Spaces are currently exploring ways to improve access to the northern end of Bartlett Park including new pedestrian crossing on Upper North Street.

11.8 Question from Councillor Abdal Ullah:

With the 50th Anniversary of Bangladesh as an Independent nation, and as we have

a large British Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets, will the Council be planning to celebrate and recognise the significant contributions of the local Bangladeshi communities in the East End?

Response from Councillor Sabina Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit:

Thank you Cllr Ullah, I'm glad you asked this question. I know some opposition councillors have suggested this is not something we should care about but the Mayor and I and many of my colleagues are proud and clear that for many of our residents the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence will be an important moment and it is entirely right the council celebrates the occasion given our close ties with Bangladesh. This event has a great deal of history and this is an educational opportunity for our borough and we should involve young people so the next generation remembers their heritage.

Due to the pandemic, we will not be able to put on large scale events however we are drawing up plans for a series of online cultural events, performances and exhibitions for delivery between March and December

Once agreed a page on our website will promote all of the activities taking place both by the council and through our many excellent community organisations.

We have started some initial meetings and set up a working group to help us organise this celebrate and how we can work with others to bring out the history and her

11.9 Question from Councillor Kyrsten Perry:

When will the double yellow lines be painted opposite Arnhem Wharf School?

Response from Councillor Dan Tomlinson – Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (Job Share) - Lead on Public Realm:

A meeting was recently held between Arnhem Wharf Primary School leadership team and Traffic Service officers review the temporary school street requirements in the area. It was identified that there was a need for heightened waiting restrictions due to the observed opportunity to park and drop-off in Westferry Road at the junction with Arnhem Place.

The proposal to increase the single yellow line timed restrictions to Double Yellow "at any time" waiting restrictions was implemented during the last week of November 2020.

11.10 Question from Councillor Marc Francis:

Will the Lead Member for Finance & Resources set out how many self-employed Council Tax Support claimants have benefitted from the suspension of the use of the Minimum Income Floor so far in 2020/21, and what is the current estimated cost of this concession for the whole financial year?

Response from Councillor Candida Ronald, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector:

Our Council Tax Reduction Scheme is a real lifeline for many residents, and it means that we reduce council tax bills for over 31,000 of the poorest households in Tower Hamlets.

Between March 2020 to present, the cost of our CTRS has increased from £27.9m to £31.4m

Since March 2020 the number of CTR claims with Self Employed income has dropped from 857 to 838, but of these the number that are UC claims has increased from 443 to 573. All of these are no longer affected by the MIF.

As a result, the number of cases affected by the MIF has decreased from 297 to 261 during the same period. Where we are advised that the MIF is causing hardship, we look at each case to assess whether S13a could be used in mitigation, and to date this year we have awarded £133,137.67 under Section 13a.

We have also awarded £1.7m under the Hardship Fund to those who were assessed as still having something to pay.

11.11 Question from Councillor Val Whitehead:

How have we supported foster carers during the pandemic?

Response from Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children and Schools:

Foster carers play a vital role in improving the lives of children in Tower Hamlets so it's important that they feel supported during this difficult time.

The council has supported foster carers in the following ways:

- Supervision visits have continued throughout and have always been a mix of either face to face or virtual, with most now being carried out virtually. Most support Social Workers are in a routine of calling carers 2-3 times a week.
- We continue to deliver virtual training.
- Support group sessions for carers have continued virtually. These have been offered to both groups of mainstream carers as well as the Mockingbird project.
- We continue to facilitate the work of the Foster Care Associates.
- We have recently appointed a clinical psychologist who is also offering carers a virtual clinic to help carers manage difficult behaviours.
- Support and regular (twice weekly contact) with foster carers from the Virtual School teachers to provide advice and support for home learning.
- Locally, we are including foster carers in our definition of 'social care' workforce for priority vaccinations. I'm pleased to report a number of our foster carers have now been vaccinated.

11.12 Question from Councillor John Pierce

Can the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Community Safety provide an update on any proposals for the Council's Budget 21/22 that will help tackle crime and ASB in Bethnal Green?

Response from Councillor Asma Begum, Deputy Mayor for Community Safety, Youth and Equalities:

The Council is committed to addressing resident concerns and reducing ASB in our borough. The Council has a series of ambitious commitments under the ASB Blueprint which was agreed by the Mayor in Cabinet in 2017.

A key strand of this work was a commitment to a localised neighbourhood approach to tackling ASB, and to put victims and residents at the heart of this approach. This was developed through the successful Neighbourhood Management which has been effective in managing the response to local neighbourhood crime and ASB.

The medium-term financial plan proposes to continue to fund the project which was implemented in the North West of the Borough in 2018. As a result Bethnal Green would continue to benefit from this localised approach.

Furthermore, our Budget invests £1m a year for the Partnership Task Force, our council funded police officers who focus on those crimes most of concern to our residents including drugs and anti-social behaviour.

11.13 Question from Councillor James King:

How has the council responded to the proposed academisation of Cyril Jackson Primary School in Limehouse?

Response from Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children and Schools:

Thank you for this question Cllr King I know you've been active in representing parents in your ward on this issue.

The council supports the principle that it is for the school governing body to make a decision about whether or not a school should academise.

The Local Authority, in line with its statutory role, initially advised the school on the statutory consultation process. Following complaints a review of the consultation process was commissioned in agreement with the Governing Body.

In response to the application to academise, the school was asked to run a second public consultation by the DfE. Again the LA advised on the consultation process and its important that the views of parents and any impact on learning are fully considered.

That consultation has now closed. Whatever arrangements are in place we work with

all our schools whatever type of governance they have in place through our Tower Hamlets Education Partnership to ensure that parents and children are supported so children get the best outcomes.

11.14 Question from Councillor Kevin Brady:

Please can the lead member provide an update on the remainder of the construction plans for the Bethnal Green Liveable Streets project?

Response from Councillor Dan Tomlinson – Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (Job Share) - Lead on Public Realm:

Following a number of community sessions to discuss the designs for specific areas, the programme has now moved into the construction phase.

On Old Bethnal Green Road, planting, signage and road markings are to be in place by mid-February. The final one-way in Mansford Street is to be installed late January/early February.

Gosset Street/Columbia Road junction is due to begin at the end of January following sessions with the community to discuss design and use of the space. The works are estimated to last 8 weeks.

Arnold Circus received an interim project with the use of planters at the end of 2020. Following further discussion with the community the project is scheduled to progress in March over 10-12 weeks.

Ropley Street design has been placed online for further comments with a further webinar with residents on the design at the end of January.

We are considering carefully how best to manage the traffic at Warner Place/Squirries Street junction. An update on this scheme will be sent to residents soon.

Some construction works and obtaining materials have been affected by COVID-19, and this may continue into the weeks ahead.

11.15 Question from Councillor Puru Miah:

What is the Council's view as the planning authority on the recent application by the Trumans Brewery?

Councillor Eve McQuillan , Cabinet Member for Planning and Social Inclusion (Job Share) - Lead on Planning

As you are aware, this is a live application which will be considered by the council's Development Committee.

Officers are currently assessing the application and considering the representations received as part of the statutory consultation process.

To date we have received 2,292 representations: 2,211 in objection and 92 in support however I should stress that while the Committee will be aware of the number of representations and their views, they will need to limit their consideration to the strength of the planning concerns raised in the responses rather than the number of objectors or supporters.

11.16 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan:

The Mayor and the Lead Member for Adult Social Care Cllr Blake repeatedly tell residents that carers, the vulnerable and older people need support - why are they then consulting on closing the three-Day Care Centres for vulnerable adults in the borough instead of ring fencing these services and looking at savings elsewhere?"

Response from Councillor Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor for Adults, Health and Wellbeing:

Thank you Cllr Khan. As you say, we are committed to supporting our vulnerable and older people. That's why we have put millions of pounds of extra funding into Adult Social Care and why in 2021/22 we will spend £12m more on adult social care than we did when you were last a Cabinet member. Our Linkage Plus partnerships, Community Navigators, Homecare workers, Reablement Team, Telecare Team and community partners are supporting vulnerable and older people everyday. When you were last a Cabinet Member, the Council proposed a saving of £167k through "greater efficiency at Pritchard's Road Day Centre and a further £1.4m through "modernising learning disability day services" so I know you will understand the context of reviewing services like these.

As you will know, the council continues to face significant financial challenges as government funding is reduced. The pandemic has exacerbated this but it has also meant changes to the way some services are delivered. For example, the three day centres you refer to have been closed since the pandemic began. In their place we have offered alternative support to those who would otherwise have attended.

The current proposal, which has been consulted on and builds on discussions with service users, would put in place alternative support which involve fewer buildings based services but continue to offer flexible support in different ways including through a community hub model which would allow people to access different forms of support and enable people to take part in activities that they enjoy and support their independence. The pandemic has shown that what matters is the quality of the services we provide, not the buildings they were once based in. That is where we propose to focus our resources.

11.17 Question from Councillor Harun Miah:

Recently there has been an increase in anti-social behaviour and vehicle vandalism in and around the carpark in Bernardo Gardens, Shadwell. Can the Mayor look into the option of installing CCTV in the hotspot, in order to detect and deter crimes, as a matter of urgency?

Response from Councillor Asma Begum, Deputy Mayor for Community Safety, Youth and Equalities:

The council works in partnership with the Metropolitan Police, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and other law enforcement agencies to monitor public space CCTV in the borough and support civil and criminal proceedings.

The Council provides a CCTV service with around 350 fixed public space cameras operating throughout the borough for a broad range of purposes.

Where there is an increase in ASB or crime, the Council utilises a more flexible approach through the use of re-deployable CCTV cameras. These cameras are deployed as a temporary measure to deal with emerging issues. The request for deployment in this area must be compatible with a set of objectives which includes to protect areas and premises used by the public and to deter and detect crime and ASB among others. It must also be supported by data and compliant with the Surveillance Camera Commissioner's Code of Conduct with regards to privacy and collateral intrusion.

The carpark in question is managed by Tower Hamlets Community Housing. However, the Council's ASB & Community Safety Team Leader will be in contact with THCH's ASB team to seek to address the concerns raised.