

## Appendix A

### Written Responses to Member Questions not put at the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2021 Council Meeting

#### 10.1 Question from Councillor Leema Qureshi

Can the Mayor or Cabinet Member please provide information on how many affordable homes have been built in the borough since 2015?

#### Response from Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Housing

Between 2015/16 and 2020/21, I'm pleased to report that 4,424 affordable homes have been built in the borough.

I'm really proud of the work we do on housing, and it makes such a big difference to the lives of our residents.

We've set ambitious targets for ourselves to deliver thousands of new homes, and we're delivering the much-needed new affordable and new council homes that we need in Tower Hamlets.

We're investing heavily in providing new homes, but we also do a lot in other housing issues, for example protecting private renters' rights, cracking down on rogue landlords, and of course our landlord licensing scheme.

But we also have to be realistic about the scale of the challenge we face. There is a housing crisis in this country, and the Government is simply not doing enough to tackle it, instead they pursue policies which actually worsen the crisis.

We need the Government to step up and start backing our local councils who are doing everything they can to tackle the crisis.

Tenure Type	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Total
Total Affordable Completions	952	1376	383	118	1005	590	4424
Private Market	1634	3703	1060	915	3092	2113	12517

#### 10.2 Question from Councillor Peter Golds

Noting the problems regarding consultation with both school streets and liveable streets will the Mayor explain how he and his officers liaise with the emergency services before implementation of his proposals.

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

As you'd expect, the council has continually consulted key stakeholders, including the emergency services, in relation to both of these programmes.

Before and as schemes are implemented, the council works with the emergency services to understand how they use the roads and to amend schemes when requests are received.

For Liveable Streets, the council holds monthly Emergency Services User Group meetings to present the programme and individual schemes to all three emergency services as well as holding individual meetings for larger, more complex schemes.

For school streets, officers are in regular contact with emergency services and so far there hasn't been any major issues that have been raised.

### **10.3 Question from Councillor Dipa Das**

How will the Government's cuts to Discretionary Housing Payments affect residents in Tower Hamlets and in particular how will the Council's Tackling Poverty work help to support these residents?

#### **Response from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin, Cabinet Member for Planning and Social Inclusion (Job Share) - Lead on Social Inclusion**

The Government's cut to Discretion Housing Payment is deeply disappointing and has come at the worst time. Residents have struggled with the economic impact of the pandemic which has led to an increase in applications. Last year, we received a total of 2120 applications, and in the last 3 months only we have already received 531 applications.

The Council received a funding of £1.9m last year which was fully spent helping our residents who are struggling to pay rent. This year, the council received around 45% less funding allocated for just 6 months with a small top-up to be received midway through the year. There has been little to no clarity on the amount Tower Hamlets will receive as a top-up or when exactly it will be received.

We have written to the Housing Minister to call for the cuts to be reversed and for more investment to be made in Discretion Housing Payment. The cuts will hurt many households in Tower Hamlets and worsen the poverty levels we have been working hard to tackle. Additionally, the Government's decision to withhold the further funding until mid-year and not disclose the level of funding Tower Hamlets will receive has placed a huge challenge on us and has made it difficult to plan for the future to ensure we can help those who need it most.

### **10.4 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood**

Can the Council help find new facilities for the Police Cadets based at the Isle of Dogs Police station which has been sold as well as the 2nd East London Scouts twice now forced out of their base by squatters?

#### **Response from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin, Cabinet Member for Planning and Social Inclusion (Job Share) - Lead on Social Inclusion**

The police cadets and scouts are both valued local organisations, and I'm very keen to support them to find alternatives.

Finding spaces can be challenging, particularly on the Island where we have a limited number of council-owned assets, and of course we have to balance our available spaces between availability for the community and our best value duty, but we can certainly work with them to find space.

You will be aware that we provide details of community spaces on our website, providing details of more than 80 halls and venues for hire ranging from community centres to churches, in addition to our network of community hubs.

The property lettings page gives information on properties being marketed for lease, some of which may be suitable for community use. The information is updated frequently as new properties become available and existing opportunities go under offer.

I'm very happy to meet with the organisations to discuss what their needs are and to offer support in finding suitable alternatives.

### **10.5 Question from Councillor Amina Ali**

What action is the Council taking to drive up vaccination rates in Tower Hamlets?

#### **Response from Councillor Rachel Blake Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing**

190,000 residents have now received their first dose and 97,000 have received their second dose.

Residents have been accessing vaccinations from a range of sites – community pharmacies, primary care network sites, community clinics and mass vaccination sites outside of the borough

We were the first in London to set up a multilingual helpline which proactively called people who had not responded to their invitation for vaccination and also provide information and advice.

We've also set up community clinics to increase access to vaccination and address inequalities. This led to regular clinics in the East London Mosque and Granby Hall (particularly targeted at Somali residents).

A programme of further community clinics is being implemented using schools, parks, voluntary sector organisations and other settings.

To increase accessibility, all clinics in Tower Hamlets take both booked and walk in appointments.

We have engaged with residents through a range of channels including COVID Champions, COVID ambassadors and targeted outreach.

Currently, a key focus for us is young people. This is a particular challenge for Tower Hamlets as it has amongst the highest proportion of young people in the country. There has been extensive engagement with young people networks to understand barriers they may have to taking up the vaccine and this has informed our ongoing communications.

## **10.6 Question from Councillor Shad Chowdhury**

How will the Mayor's £3m Covid Recovery Fund be used to support the borough's recovery over the coming months and years?

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

The damage that Covid has caused to lives, to the economy and to our community has been enormous.

While the pandemic isn't over, it's important that we support our borough's recovery from the crisis. This month, as part of this, we agreed my Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund.

This is a £3 million investment that we're putting into various projects across Tower Hamlets to help kickstart our community's recovery from the pandemic.

I know how hard the last 15 months have been on all of us, and as we gradually return to some form of normality we want to use this money to build a brighter future for our borough.

We'll be focussing on supporting

- Mental and physical health
- Children and young people
- Our local economy
- Welfare advice
- And we also want to use some of the money to come together again and celebrate the way our community has rallied together.

It's been a tough time for us all and this fund will help our great borough to recover.

## **10.7 Question from Councillor Val Whitehead**

What progress is the council making in meeting its commitments on climate change?

### **Response from Councillor Asma Islam, Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (Job Share) - Lead on Environment**

In March 2021, the mayor agreed the Net Zero Carbon Plan, setting out two ambitious targets – to become a net zero council by 2025 and a net zero borough by 2050.

To achieve the 2025 target, officers have developed the Net Zero Carbon action plan. The delivery of actions is regularly monitored by the Air Quality and Net Zero Strategic Working Group made up of officers from relevant services.

There is a dedicated Climate Emergency page on our website which outlines specific steps we've made to reduce our carbon emissions.

As the first step in the journey to a net zero carbon borough, the council hosted a Climate Engagement Event in March 2021. Over 70 representatives from the council and partner organisations participated and agreed to work together to achieve this target.

The Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group agreed to own and monitor a boroughwide action plan and established a time-limited taskforce to develop a boroughwide plan.

The first of three taskforce meetings to inform the development of the plan was held on 7 July. The action plan will be launched in November to coincide with the UN COP26 summit in Glasgow.

### **10.8 Question from Councillor Marc Francis**

Will the Lead Member for Housing provide an update on the roll-out of the Traffic Management Orders to enable parking enforcement on our council housing estates?

#### **Response from Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Housing**

As a borough with a growing population we have to strike a balance in parking policy to ensure residents can park but we enforce to ensure parking bays are not being mis-used.

In Shadwell Gardens and Wapping I'm pleased to report that the scheme is now fully operational and compliance is high. Visitor scratch-cards will shortly be available to THH residents only and enforcement is taking place.

Solander Gardens: We have consulted with residents and ward councillors and works are now progressing.

Royal Mint: The consultation has been concluded and we anticipate work starting in late summer or autumn.

Berners Estate: The consultation has now finished. A petition has been received against the scheme and this is being considered. Ward members have also requested a follow up meeting.

Spitalfields and Banglatown: The consultation is ready to go ahead and an Open Day is proposed in late July.

Colombia Road: We will be consulting shortly on an area including Avebury and Dorset Estate. At Gosset Street a joint project has been looked at with Liveable Streets.

Experimental Traffic Management Orders: These exist on the Stepney Causeway area in Pitsea and around Hanbury Street and have experienced some enforcement issues which are being taken up with the contractor.

### **10.9 Question from Councillor Bex White**

What is the council doing about mopeds, motorbikes and pushbikes being ridden on pavements in connection with the increase in food delivery. Will we be incorporating this into the licensing policy and processes to ensure that takeaway food premises have a plan that doesn't involve using the pavements inappropriately?

### **Response from Councillor Asma Islam, Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (Job Share) - Lead on Environment**

I understand that this is a growing area of concern for some residents.

The food delivery platforms are independent to the food premises and there would be very little control that the food premises can exert over the delivery driver. This would therefore fall outside the Licensing Policy.

However, riding on the pavement is already illegal and this is a matter that the police and other enforcement agencies to take up if required. Any hot spots that are identified can be referred to the police via 101 and I would encourage residents to do so.

### **10.10 Question from Councillor Tarik Khan**

What assessment has been made of the funding announced by the Government to help school pupils catch-up?

### **Response from Councillor Asma Begum, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Children, Youth Services and Education**

Covid-19 has had an enormous impact on our children and young people and the disruption to their educations means that work is need to bring pupils to where they need to be.

The funding received was allocated to schools on a per pupil basis for 20/21 academic year. The funding must be used to suit the individual needs of pupils with a particular focus on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. School leaders must be able to demonstrate that they are using the funding to support pupils' educational recovery in line with curriculum expectations. Governors/Trustees must scrutinise the school's approaches including their plans. Schools are expected to provide details on their websites regarding the Coronavirus (COVID 19) catch up premium. When inspections resume in September 2021, Ofsted will assess and evaluate how the catch- up premium has been used. The Tower Hamlets Education Partnership provides challenge and support to our schools in relation to their learning recovery work.

The Government's education recovery plan is not enough to meet the needs of the children in our schools or help resolve the impact the pandemic has made on education. Therefore, we will continue to lobby the government for a more significant and longer-term investment in our children's future.

### **10.11 Question from Councillor Kyrsten Perry**

Can the Mayor or Cabinet Member provide an update on the delivery of new street trees?

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

The council is committed to increasing and maintaining a safe tree stock across the borough. It is well evidenced that trees provide numerous health, social, economic and environmental benefits.

You will be aware of our manifesto commitment to plant 1000 new street trees by the end of 2022, I'm delighted to report that the council has planted 700 trees and has a further 300 trees scheduled for delivery from 1st October this year, when the planting season begins again.

Having targeted Poplar and Bow in year one, the Isle of Dogs and Stepney in year two, the final phase of planting will focus on the Wapping and Bethnal Green areas.

### **10.12 Question from Councillor Victoria Obaze**

Can the Mayor or Cabinet Member update members on the Covid-19 Response Annual Report, and how the council has responded to the pandemic?

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

The pandemic has been an extremely challenging time for our residents. The Covid-19 Response Annual Report provides a description of how the council has responded to the pandemic. This includes but not limited to

- Prevent and limiting the spread of Covid-19.
- Supporting the most vulnerable through the pandemic
- Supporting children and families through lockdown and school closure
- Supporting businesses and residents through economic hardship
- Help make Tower Hamlets as safe a place as possible
- And, working in close partnership with our communities

Whilst the focus of the report is over 2020-21, appendix I also includes key updates up to June 2021 where relevant (e.g. on vaccination levels).

We will continue to support our residents through this pandemic, particularly our most vulnerable residents and continue to provide updates where necessary.

### **10.13 Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed**

Can the Mayor or Cabinet Member give an update on the decision to renew the council's selective licensing scheme, and what other measures are in place to protect private renters

#### **Response from Councillor Eve McQuillan – Cabinet Member for Planning and Social Inclusion (Job Share) - Lead on Planning**

The Mayor and Cabinet recently approved the renewal of the selective licensing scheme.

Under this scheme to date, Environmental Health staff have recovered £320,000 in rent repayment orders for tenants where landlords have not licensed their properties across the borough.

Landlord licensing has been a game changer for us to take action against rogue landlords. We want to see big reforms in the private rented sector to reset the balance of power between landlords and renters.

Currently we can only licence in a limited area of these 3 wards but we'd like government to extend this - while we are using all the powers we have at our disposal to protect renters we want to be able to do more.

This scheme complements the current mandatory Housing Multiple Occupation and additional HMO licensing schemes that we have in place and our Private Renters Charter to drive up standards in the sector.

### **10.14 Question from Councillor Shah Ameen**

What continuing support is available to help our local businesses as restrictions are eased and as trading begins to gradually recover?

#### **Response from Councillor Motin Uz-zaman, Cabinet Member for Work and Economic Growth**

Local businesses continue to be supported through the Business Rates Retail Relief and Nursery Relief Schemes although this has been reduced from 100% relief available from April to June, to 66% relief for the remaining 9 months of the year.

Further funding will also be available through the Additional Restrictions Grant scheme with details on the amount to be confirmed on 16th July 2021.

The business rates team is also taking a more lenient approach on collection for the first 6 months of the year working with local business that are struggling to pay, making longer arrangements where we can and not taking any court action. This will be reviewed as we begin to understand the effect of the furloughing schemes coming to an end, and whether businesses are continuing to trade or are closing down.

The Enterprise Team are currently finalising arrangements for a range of COVID-recovery focussed projects, including:

- The 'PIVOT project', an extension of a previous pilot project, is a business support initiative that will provide funding and advice to a minimum of 150 x TH businesses seeking to access new sources of revenue as a result of the pandemic.

- The Creative Freelance Futures project; a new project offering support and funding to a minimum of 60 x TH freelance workers in the cultural and creative industries.
- A COVID business adaptation grant, a new grant which will provide funding to a minimum of 240 TH SMEs, to make additional COVID-safe physical adaptations to their businesses, in order to trade safely.

### **10.15 Question from Councillor Kahar Chowdhury**

Can the Mayor or Cabinet Member provide an update on the Council's planned summer activities programme?

### **Response from Councillor Sabina Akhtar , Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing**

The council, voluntary sector groups and wider partnership organisations have worked together to plan and deliver a comprehensive programme of more than 200 events, activities and play opportunities for children, young people, and families during the school holiday. The majority of activities are free for residents to access.

The summer programme will support children, young people and families to recover from the impact of the pandemic and include Bounce Back to Play projects, walking football, basketball, holiday provision, arts activities and outdoor events to support families in keeping children learning, entertained and active over the summer.

Over 40 Holiday Activity and Food clubs (HAF) will be offering around 4,000 places to children and teenagers, ages 5 – 18 years. The HAF programme supports children to eat healthier, be more active and be safe. Families who receive free school meals will be given priority places. Summer activities will be available online and face-to-face and will take place in schools, community centres, children centres, playgrounds, Idea Stores, parks & open spaces.

### **10.16 Question from Councillor Gabriella Salva-Macallan**

The Council have earmarked a community centre, the Canal Club in St Peter's Wards for demolition as part of the council house building project. Would the Mayor and lead member consider meeting with local residents to discuss 'meanwhile use' by the local community of the centre?

### **Response from Councillor Mufedah Bustin, Cabinet Member for Planning and Social Inclusion (Job Share) - Lead on Social Inclusion**

A planning application is pending consideration by committee for the redevelopment of the Canal Club site as part of the Mayor's Homes Programme, and the previous permanent tenants (a nursery) have been found alternative accommodation.

The vacant premises were recently squatted and there is a risk of this recurring if the building is not either secured or occupied for the greater part of the time. Officers need to use their professional expertise to determine whether any proposed meanwhile use would be of sufficient scale to deter further squatting. I am happy to meet the TRA, with officers, to hear their proposals and understand whether they could meet these criteria.

### **10.17 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan**

Mayor John Biggs is proposing to spend £2,996,265 on the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund. Will the Mayor ensure money is allocated to address educational digital divide so that every child in the borough has access to a laptop or IT device over the summer and when schools reopen to support children's gap in their learning caused by Covid?

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

In Tower Hamlets one-in-four children is digitally disadvantaged – with no means of accessing their education online.

Even with the return of face-to-face classroom learning the pandemic has highlighted the importance of learning from home.

We have, in addition to limited government support, set up a local campaign to get kids the tech they need.

There has been intensive work to lobby the DfE and support schools to maximise the opportunities from their scheme providing free devices to children.

We have secured 10,478 laptops from the DfE to be distributed in Tower Hamlets. This distribution level is the highest in London and almost double the amount of any other London Borough.

The Council has also committed £50,000 towards further devices, as well as working to repurpose 250 old council laptops.

The Every Child Online campaign has secured a further £130,000 in corporate and individual donations.

The work is now moving from the focus on lockdowns and remote learning for children out of school, into a longer term campaign to ensure that every child in the borough has the equipment to learn effectively. after effectively add 'The above resources have however been secured from outside of the Covid Recovery Fund, and an alternative funding strategy for this important priority is therefore in place.