

Item 11: Member Questions and Answers

<p>11.1</p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Amin Rahman</b></p>	<p>Can the lead member update the chamber on where we are with the council's accounts? These accounts have been left unsigned for the past 6 years thanks to the previous administration.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>For 2016/17 and 2017/18 KPMG have issued draft certificates and these will be signed once Deloitte complete their audits for subsequent years.</p> <p>2018/19 and 2019/20 audits are ongoing by Deloitte and nearing completion.</p> <p>The 2020/21 audit has not yet commenced, and Deloitte will commence this once their 2018/19 and 2019/20 accounts are signed.</p> <p>The 2021/22 accounts will be audited once the 2020/21 audit is completed.</p>
<p>11.2</p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Shubo Hussain</b></p>	<p>It was Small Business Saturday last month. The previous Labour administration invested a huge amount of money into our local small businesses when they were negatively impacted by the pandemic.</p> <p>Given the uncertainty surrounding Government support for small businesses, will the Mayor commit to the Labour Group's proposals of a Small Business Hardship Fund and much-needed Business Rates relief in these times of crisis?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>For Small Business Saturday 2023, the Council encouraged residents and visitors to 'shop local' and showcased local businesses via channels including social media and Our East End. Shopping local is something we can all do more; it doesn't require sustained public investment and creates an important economic multiplier effect that generates wealth for our residents. The initiative has been well-received by local businesses and is something that this administration will grow and develop over the coming year.</p>

		<p>The money that Councillor Hussain refers to in his question was principally provided by central government as part of HM Treasury’s COVID recovery financial package of support for small businesses; rather than funds generated by the previous administration. Whilst that package of financial support ended in 2022; we are working on a new range of support for small businesses that will support them with rising energy costs and the ‘cost-of-doing-business’ crisis. We look forward to announcing more about this package of support within the coming month.</p> <p>This administration has already supported small businesses via the CARF (COVID additional relief fund) grant, which supported a great number of small businesses (859) in the borough to reduce their business rates liability in 2022. This administration will continue to provide Small Business Rate Relief (zero business rates bill for businesses with a rateable value of £12,000 or less) to support small TH businesses to survive during these challenging times.</p> <p>We’ll continue to explore opportunities to support local businesses to trade in the borough, including helping businesses to cope with rising energy costs and the costs of doing business.</p>
11.3	<p><b>Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury</b></p>	<p>The answers to the questions from the last meeting of Full Council indicated that the Lead Member was in conversation with the Chief Executive concerning the acceleration of a Council-wide audit. Could the Mayor provide an update on this process?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Following a motion at Full Council on 27th July – in direct reference to the audit of the Council’s accounts and a HM Inspection probation report regarding Youth Offenders Services, briefings to the Mayor have been delivered providing updates on progress on the independent reviews on the preparation of the Council’s accounts for audit and Youth Justice service, as well as additional information on other areas the Mayor raised on community safety, and overcrowded housing.</p> <p>In relation to the review of the preparation of the Council’s accounts for audit, the council commissioned Worth Technical</p>

		<p>Accounting Solutions to carry out an independent assessment of the Council's accounts preparation and examine progress since the errors arose in 2018/19 and highlight any gaps. This review has been completed, reported to the Mayor, and was reported to the Audit Committee in November 2022.</p> <p>On the Youth Justice service, external auditors will commence their audit by attending the Youth Justice Operational Board on 9th February and will then be completing a week of audits the week commencing 20th February with a view that after a week on site, they will be able to produce a report by 13th March 2023.</p> <p>Regarding community safety, an options paper has been produced for discussion with the Mayor, for establishing a Mayor's Anti-Crime and Disorder Taskforce to provide a response to the rising epidemic of violence, and to deal with extreme anti-social behaviour and problematic behaviour at night.</p> <p>On overcrowding, a set of actions have been agreed which cover delivery of affordable homes and making better use of our existing stock, Corporate directors of Place and Divisional director of Housing will meet periodically with the Mayor and Lead Member to monitor progress on these actions.</p> <p>The council has a comprehensive improvement programme which provides assurance through our performance management framework, audit, and external inspection regime. This includes corporate and public reporting including Audit Committee, Overview and Scrutiny, and a commitment to an LGA Corporate Peer Review this year to continue to drive improvement across all our services.</p>
<p><b>11.4</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin</b></p>	<p>Please could the Mayor and Lead Member explain why they have reversed the decision to grant the Mudchute Association a 99 year lease?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Following the election of a new administration in May 2022, there is currently a review of all transactions that have been agreed but not as yet completed.</p>

		At this stage a formal decision has not been taken, and a report will need to go through the Council's governance processes.
11.5	<b>Question from Councillor Wahid Ali</b>	<p>One of the Mayor's central manifesto pledges was reinvesting in the council's youth services, can he provide an update on this?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The new Strategic Plan sets out the mayor's ambitious direction for the coming years which includes a priority to invest in youth services for Tower Hamlets young people. A comprehensive programme of work to deliver the transformation of the local authority youth service is already underway which is governed by a strategic Youth Service Redesign Executive Group and operational Youth Service Redesign Group. The transformation of the local authority youth service is currently in phase 1 which will see the development of the council delivering open access provision, detached youth work and targeted support for young people as well as their families.</p>
11.6	<b>Question from Councillor Amy Lee</b>	<p>Will the Mayor fully outline his plan for social care in the borough?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>In late 2021, a new Adult Social Care Transformation Programme and Strategy was developed. The Strategy 'Improving Care Together' is for 3-5 years, and seeks to support people to meet their goals, be connected to others and independent as possible. Some of the key aims of this strategy are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• empower people to meet their needs and aspirations,</li> <li>• provide support that improves health, wellbeing, and quality of life.</li> <li>• co-produce services and care with people who use them.</li> <li>• ensure people have the right support to meet their wishes and outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>The Programme consists of the following key areas of activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget and Charging – Improving on securing income, recovering debt, more efficient systems and better budget management</li> <li>• Purchase to Pay – Improving the processes in paying for and</li> </ul>

		<p>providing the care and support people need to make them quicker and more efficient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information, Advice &amp; Early Help – Ensuring everyone has access to the information and advice they need and get support at an early stage.</li> <li>• Housing with Care – Providing an improved model to people where they receive housing and care services.</li> <li>• Homecare – Providing an improved model of care to people in their own homes.</li> <li>• Direct Payments – Giving more people the opportunity to manage their own budget for their care.</li> <li>• Training – Equipping our staff with the learning they need to take a strengths based approach to people’s care and thereby improve the service.</li> <li>• Supervision – Making sure that managers take responsibility for their teams taking a strengths based approach to people’s care and thereby improving the service.</li> <li>• Culture Change – Transforming the culture of our staff and providers so that we take a strengths based approach to people’s care and thereby improve the service.</li> <li>• Technology Enabled Care – Enabling more people to have access to the latest technology to enable them to be more independent and feel more in control.</li> <li>• Data Quality – Ensuring our data is accurate, timely etc, simplifying processes and enabling a data led approach.</li> </ul> <p>In addition to this programme, the Mayor has committed to reintroducing free home care in the borough. This is reflected in the MTFS.</p>
11.7	<p><b>Question from Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled</b></p>	<p>Could the Lead Member provide an update on the Council’s Budget for 2023/24, and what are the key headlines?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>A draft of the budget report was presented to Cabinet on Wednesday 4 January which outlined the Council’s funding position, growth and savings items and latest budget gap. The papers for this item can be accessed on the Council’s website.</p> <p>The next update of the budget report, which will include the capital programme, will be presented to Cabinet on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> January.</p>

11.8	<p><b>Question from Councillor Marc Francis</b></p>	<p>Can the Mayor and Lead Member let me know what action is being taken to revitalise Roman Road market and the local high street?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The High Streets Team continues to work with local traders, businesses, community groups and residents to develop proposals to improve Globe Town (Roman Road West) high street and Globe Town market square.</p> <p>Projects to date have included: shopfront improvement grants, market square refurbishment, a mural to celebrate local histories and the re-opening of a Network Rail viaduct to better connect 15,000 QMUL staff and students to Globe Town via Meath Gardens.</p> <p>The recently completed shopfront improvements supported five high street businesses plus one vacant council unit. Site works to the market square commenced in October 2022 and are due to complete end of February 2023.</p> <p>The design incorporates the aspiration of traders, businesses, community groups and local residents, and will deliver: planting of native mature, semi-mature and fruit trees, low level planting, seating, bike parking and lighting with traders integrated power supply.</p> <p>The improvements will make the square more appealing for our local communities to shop, sit, meet and play, whilst customers and new traders.</p> <p>We are working with a local community group on the low level planting design, and are planning to host a planting event to relaunch the market square in early Spring 2023.</p> <p>Market Traders at Roman Road (East) have requested better parking provision for their customers. From the 1st February 2023 all visitors to Roman Road will be able to park for one hour for free, and this will create 30 new parking spaces.</p>

<p><b>11.9</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Musthak Ahmed</b></p>	<p>Could the Mayor provide an update of where the Council is with the Liveable Streets consultation?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>In the summer of 2022, the council undertook a series of public opinion surveys to gain a better understanding of public opinion on Liveable Streets schemes.</p> <p>We received a very significant number of responses which has helped to shape our thinking going forward.</p> <p>Over 1300 responses were received for the Brick Lane consultation and nearly 7000 for the Bethnal Green consultations.</p> <p>The results of each consultation can be found on the Talk Tower Hamlets Pages.</p> <p>This week we will begin distribution of material for the next stage of consultations for Bethnal Green and Brick Lane for all the addresses in each scheme area. The consultations will launch on Monday 23rd January and will close on Sunday 12th February 2023.</p> <p>A decision on next steps will be made following a careful analysis of the data available to us and the responses we receive as part of the consultation.</p>
<p><b>11.10</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Amina Ali</b></p>	<p>As you will know, the previous Labour administration invested £3.1 million to deliver the Council’s CCTV Transformation Programme.</p> <p>Can the Lead Member please provide an update on this vital work to enhance community safety for our residents?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CCTV Transformation Programme supports the new Mayor’s Manifesto commitments and will:</li> <li>• ‘Maintain our award-winning boroughwide CCTV service, which has been vital in detecting crime and identifying offenders. Work with local landlords and businesses to widen its scope.</li> <li>• ‘Identify crime hotspots and tackle them – for example by</li> </ul>

		<p>improving lighting and street design and using CCTV.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of the Transformation Programme is well advanced:</li> <li>• Upgrading all the equipment for the new CCTV Control Room is completed.</li> <li>• 159 new digital cameras (44% of total) have been installed to replace old analogue cameras – work is ongoing.</li> <li>• Moving and re-designing the upgraded CCTV Control Room from current location to a new site – work is ongoing.</li> <li>• A new CCTV mobile unit has delivered a successful deterrent at crime and ASB hotspots around the Borough.</li> <li>• 15 re-deployable cameras have been purchased to further tackle hotspots and provide a flexible resource.</li> </ul>
<p><b>11.11</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Abdul Mannan</b></p>	<p>Can the lead member explain what progress the Youth Justice Management Board has made in addressing each of the Inspectors' recommendations made in the HMIP inspection the Tower Hamlets &amp; City of London Youth Justice Service (YJS) in April 2022 – and how this progress is being measured?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Youth Justice and Young Peoples Service has been working at pace to improve outcomes for children and young people. The youth justice service has developed a comprehensive improvement plan to directly respond to the recommendations and requirements identified from the inspection which will have a positive impact on the quality of youth justice services in Tower Hamlets &amp; City of London. The programme of improvement work is well underway which is overseen at a strategic level by the Youth Justice Executive Board and at an operational level with the introduction of a new Youth Justice Operational Board.</p> <p>The youth justice service has commissioned an external organisation to review the governance arrangements that are in place as a measure for the service to receive external scrutiny regarding the impact of improvements made to date. This will take place in the first quarter of 2023 and the findings from this will be reported to the Youth Justice Executive Board</p> <p>Key Points of achievement and development:</p>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Redesign and re-launch of the Youth Justice Services Governance Board. This is ensuring that the right people, at the right level of seniority, are included to engage actively in achieving improved outcomes for children being supported by the youth justice service and wider partnership.</li> <li>- Quality checked the accuracy of data and cleansed what was incorrect.</li> <li>- Redevelopment of the Out-of-Court Offer with the data already showing that the service has diverted more children away from the formal Criminal Justice System in the last 9 months in comparison with the whole of 2021-2022. This positive impact has already been confirmed by the key performance indicator monitoring that the Youth Justice Board completes on Youth Justice Services every quarter which shows that the service is on a positive trajectory. This offer will be increased with recent Turnaround Funding from the Ministry of Justice.</li> <li>- Re-introduction of the High Risk of Harm Panel, a reflective meeting looking at the children the service is most concerned about.</li> <li>- Development of the staff charter.</li> <li>- Creation of a Youth Justice participation group so children are supported in having their voices heard.</li> <li>- Creation and establishing more projects in the community so that children can repair harm to the community.</li> </ul>
<p><b>11.12</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury</b></p>	<p>Poplar HARCA has stopped issuing parking permit except fully electric car in the Burdett Estate. The residents report that they were not consulted by the Housing Association before making such a big decision. That decision has made a serious negative impact on many residents' lifestyle and employment.</p> <p>Can the Mayor tell me what support he can offer to the affected residents of the Burdett Estate?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>This is a matter for Poplar HARCA to respond on, but of course we have an important role in ensuring that any residents who have concerns are fully heard. As such, we have passed this question on to Poplar Harca and have asked them to respond directly to Cllr Chowdhury and the Mayor's Office.</p>

11.13	<p><b>Question from Councillor Kamrul Hussain</b></p>	<p>Can the Lead Member update Full Council on what measures have been taken since the Mayor announced the Waste Emergency at the last Full Council meeting? What are the current levels of waste across the Borough?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Mayor has met with officers on a regular basis to develop and refine an action plan which will benefit residents, the community, and the waste service itself, including a focus on driving up standards in places where the levels of cleaning and waste fall below the standards the service strives to achieve, especially in areas with high footfall and where there is persistent illegal fly tipping and littering.</p> <p>The action plan was agreed by the Mayor on 11.01.2023.</p> <p>The measures we are planning to take include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reschedule the frequency and timings of cleansing to improve standards and perceptions.</li> <li>• The primary action is to rebalance the works across the collection crews to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensure every team has enough time to fully complete their assigned work.</li> <li>○ Maintain enough capacity on vehicles for the next 3-4 years to address future build programmes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Remove all the commercial waste from the current rounds and place them on dedicated commercial collection crews</li> <li>• Review Operational Managers and Environmental Managers supervision schedules</li> <li>• Increase levels of enforcement</li> </ul> <p>As part of this plan we are hoping to create new job opportunities.</p> <p>This work will enable us to have more resources, benefit our residents by way of reducing missed collections and cleaner streets and helping our community during this economic crisis by creating new jobs.</p> <p>The service is working hard to deliver this action plan, and we of course want to make sure we carry out proper due diligence,</p>

		<p>undertake thorough risk assessment and consult with our stakeholders as we undertake this vital work.</p> <p>We are also delivering some immediate interventions, including increasing frequency and changing the timing of street sweeping in high football areas in the west of the borough.</p>
11.14	<p><b>Question from Councillor Sabina Akhtar</b></p>	<p>Would the Mayor and Lead Member please provide a date for when the plans for the new school building for George Green's on the Isle of Dogs, will be made available for public consultation?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The council is currently working through the various stages of the planning application for the new school build and, as part of this process, it is expected that initial consultation will begin in late March/early April 2023.</p>
11.15	<p><b>Question from Councillor Ahmodur Khan</b></p>	<p>Could the Lead Member inform Full Council on additional measures that the Council have put in place to help residents in the Borough with the Cost-of-Living crisis?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>As a priority both of the Mayor's manifesto and the council's Strategic Plan, tackling the cost-of-living crisis has been a focal point of LBTH's work supporting low-income residents and tackling poverty in the borough.</p> <p>This has meant the delivery of a range of initiatives that were worth more than £6m last year, including a million pounds worth of payments over the summer holidays to low-income families, and direct payments to more than 31,500 residents in groups identified as being placed most at risk by the impacts of the crisis.</p> <p>Our work to mitigate the effects of this crisis is ongoing, and in the coming months LBTH will deliver another round of support for residents by utilising the latest tranche of the Household Support Fund. Plans are yet to be finalised for the full allocation, but it includes funding to be targeted at households with residents on benefits who are yet to receive Cost of Living support from either the Council and the Government and funding for those with high</p>

		<p>electrical use medical equipment. Money will also be made available by application to ensure those who need support but may not have benefited from other measures have access to funds.</p> <p>Almost £2 million of funding was provided to households with children who have benefits eligibility for free school meals before the Christmas holidays, as well as generous contributions from staff and a local charity to organisations supporting households with food. We also opened warm hubs in some of our buildings.</p> <p>This work continues alongside projects designed to tackle poverty in the medium and the long term – including the FOOD Store programme, the Council’s food hub which has benefitted from almost £200,000 of additional funding to increase allocations of food to voluntary and community sector organisations in the borough, the Holiday Activities and Food programme, the Council’s Resident Support Grant scheme, the income maximisation work of the LBTH outreach team, and the ongoing expansion of universal free school meals to all secondary school aged children.</p> <p>In order to help residents to seek help and advice, the cost-of-living campaign was launched near the end of last year with regular communications to residents about a wide range of support they can access.</p>
<p><b>11.16</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Sirajul Islam</b></p>	<p>The Frank Dobson Square Improvements Project originated in a 2019 LIF consultation entry to address safety concerns and to enhance residents use of this public space. I understand that as of July 2022 LIF funds have been allocated and a design team allocated, but there has been no progress since then.</p> <p>Can the Lead Member please provide an update on these works?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Following the election of a new administration in May 2022, a comprehensive refresh of the General Fund capital programme is underway.</p> <p>The key purpose of the review is to ensure the programme aligns</p>

		<p>with the council's strategic priorities which are translated from the Mayor's vision and the new administration's manifesto.</p> <p>The refresh will include a review of the existing priorities for the capital programme across the various directorates to ensure clear integration with the current needs of the borough and its residents. Whilst the review is ongoing, timeframes for delivery of individual projects, including Frank Dobson Square, may be extended.</p> <p>At this stage, a formal decision has not been made on any of the LIF programmes or projects, including Frank Dobson Square. If following the wider Capital Programme review, changes are required, a report will need to go through the Council's governance processes.</p>
<p><b>11.17</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Abdul Mailk</b></p>	<p>Could the Lead Member update Full Council on what this Administration is doing to ensure Tower Hamlets becomes a greener Borough?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Mayor's manifesto, and the council's Strategic Plan, have a clear emphasis on making Tower Hamlets a greener borough. In order to deliver on this work and these commitments, we have launched the Mayor's Greener Future for Tower Hamlets programme.</p> <p>The programme has been divided into 4 key areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mayor's energy fund,</li> <li>2. climate emergency,</li> <li>3. waste management,</li> <li>4. keeping the borough moving.</li> </ol> <p>To monitor the progress and implementation of these policies, the Mayor will be setting up 3 boards with key stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Mayor's Climate Advisory Board</li> <li>• The Mayor's Waste Management Taskforce</li> <li>• The Mayor's 'Keep our Borough Moving' forum</li> </ul> <p>This will enable us to deliver on our green commitments, and we will continue to keep members and residents updated on this vital</p>

		work as we move forward.
11.18	<b>Question from Councillor Abdal Ullah</b>	<p>What is the Mayor doing to encourage and incentivise businesses into empty shops, such as properties on Wapping Lane?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Council has been in negotiations with a prospective tenant for a considerable period in respect of one of the units in Wapping Lane with several legal queries requiring to be resolved.</p> <p>There is also a further unit which is also in solicitors hands with terms agreed in October last year.</p> <p>Apart from these two units we are not aware of any further council-owned units within Wapping Lane.</p> <p>As a general approach where commercial properties become vacant, they are marketed by external agents, with details placed on the Council's website. We have received strong levels of demand in certain locations, and where this is not forthcoming, the rent will be reassessed to try and incentivise retailers to take units.</p>
11.19	<b>Question from Councillor Bellal Uddin</b>	<p>Can the Lead Member provide Full Council with an update on the progress of the establishment of the Institute for Academic Excellence, as announced at last Full Council?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Officers have been in discussion with the Department for Education and with representatives of school leaders in the secondary sector to explore possible options for establishing an Institute for Academic Excellence. This process is currently at the feasibility stage, which includes looking at similar models of school organisation in other local authorities across the region. The information gathered will be used to prepare a report on the options for consideration, which will be presented to the Mayor in due course.</p>
11.20	<b>Question from</b>	Will the Mayor commit to making scrutiny effective in Tower

	<p><b>Councillor Maisha Begum</b></p>	<p>Hamlets and offer the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to a member of the opposition?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Council already has an effective scrutiny and overview process and this is not something that the Mayor should be involved in. This is a question for the Committee and not the Mayor, as they select the Chair.</p>
<p><b>11.21</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Harun Miah</b></p>	<p>Tower Hamlets used to have a thriving voluntary and community sector, can the Lead Member set out his vision and plans to re-establish this?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Tower Hamlets has one of the largest and most diverse voluntary and community sector (VCS) in London that makes a much-valued contribution to the social and economic life of the borough. The VCS plays a key role in the life of Tower Hamlets residents. It is often the first point of contact for many seeking support and access to public services. It is at the forefront of responding to several key policy issues which present a significant challenge to the public, particularly to socially excluded communities, who have a greater level of reliance on VCS services. These policy issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cost-of-living crises</li> <li>• The possibility of an economic recession</li> <li>• The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and unequal impact on Black, Asian &amp; Multi Ethnic Residents</li> <li>• The persistence of racism within society</li> <li>• Digital exclusion, which has been highlighted by the pandemic</li> </ul> <p>The council's new <b><u>Strategic Plan (2022-26)</u></b> sets out priorities for the borough over the next four years. Supporting and working in partnership with the local voluntary and community sector is a key element of delivering the council's Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Our partnership <b><u>VCS Strategy 2020-24</u></b> has a commitment for 'a more resilient and sustainable sector' and our new policy programme will contribute to this priority.</p>

### **Voluntary and community sector in Tower Hamlets**

Tower Hamlets VCS comprises a wide range of organisations, approximately 1,300 in total, delivering a range of services and activities. These organisations include:

- Registered charities
- Faith groups
- Unregistered and informal community groups, including mutual aid groups
- Social enterprises
- Tenants and residents' associations
- Co-operatives
- Community interest companies with charitable elements.

The Council recognises the important contribution the VCS makes to the social fabric of the borough, especially for residents, and to public services. It helps develop relationships between people and communities and provides opportunities for people to cultivate their imagination and interests, allowing them to flourish.

The important role of the VCS in the borough and the strength of the sector was particularly highlighted in its contribution to the response and recovery to the Covid-19 pandemic in the borough. It played a crucial role in delivering services to housebound and socially excluded residents, leading on several prominent initiatives, such as the supply and delivery of food to high risk or self-isolating residents.

The value of the VCS in Tower Hamlets is evident in the investment that the Council has placed with that sector. Between April 2022-March 2023 the Council has funded VCS organisations to deliver a range of activities with grants making up approximately £10.4m and commissioning approximately £41.7million.

### **Development of a new vision for the Voluntary and Community Sector**

The vision for the new VCS policy is to **support and invest in a thriving and diverse VCS to enable it to improve outcomes for Tower Hamlets residents**. The policy will be supported by a



	<p>proposed new corporate grants programme which focuses on the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding that supports a wider range of services and groups to ensure all sections of the community benefit from a grants programme and address the challenges facing Tower Hamlets residents</li> <li>• Funding that supports services and activities that are inclusive, promote cohesion and designed and delivered with residents</li> <li>• Long term funding to organisations in return for efficient and effective services</li> <li>• Achieving value for money</li> <li>• Alignment to the Council’s Strategic Plan</li> <li>• Improved partnership working between local VCS organisations.</li> </ul> <p>The proposed grants programme will include a new Mayor’s Community Grant programme that would involve five themes consisting of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Tackling the Cost-of-living crisis:</b> to address poverty in the borough. Examples of the type of activity include social welfare advice services and crisis support services.</li> <li>– <b>Accelerate Education:</b> to improve education attainment and development of children and young people, plus promote digital inclusion. Examples of the types of activity include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Study support</li> <li>□ ESOL</li> <li>□ Community languages</li> <li>□ SEN provision</li> <li>□ Extra circular activities and after school clubs</li> <li>□ Skills for life and digital inclusion</li> <li>□ Lifelong learning</li> </ul> </li> <li>– <b>Culture, Business, Jobs and Skills:</b> to increase employment and skills opportunities for socially excluded residents. Examples of type of include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Support for people not in education, employment or training</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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		<p>(NEETs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Targeted outreach</li> <li>□ Sports activity and promotion</li> <li>□ Entrepreneurial and innovative</li> <li>□ Job brokerage</li> <li>□ Culture and heritage</li> <li>□ Youth provision</li> </ul> <p>– <b>Invest in public services:</b> to improve the physical and mental health of local residents. Examples of type of activity include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Support for older and vulnerable people, including luncheon clubs, meals on wheels and pensioner projects</li> <li>□ Health and wellbeing projects</li> <li>□ Community activities such as reducing isolation, intergenerational activities and active lifestyle</li> </ul> <p>– <b>Empower communities and fight crime:</b> to deliver services to address inequalities experienced by people and communities reflecting different equality groups and social economic backgrounds as well as promote and tackle community safety across the borough. Example of types of activity for this theme would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Reducing inequalities</li> <li>□ Community cohesion</li> <li>□ Tackling drugs and alcohol misuse</li> <li>□ Safer communities</li> <li>□ Victim support</li> <li>□ Violence against women</li> <li>□ Ex-offender support</li> <li>□ Gang intervention and prevention</li> </ul>
11.22	<p><b>Question from Councillor Asma Begum</b></p>	<p>Regarding the introduction of one-hour free parking close to markets, Tower Hamlets has some excellent transport links, especially with the introduction of the Elizabeth Line, which makes it easy for those who want to shop and eat here to add to the local economy. This one-hour free parking will only benefit commuters and increase air pollution.</p> <p>Our residents struggle to find parking spaces close to their home.</p>

		<p>Shouldn't these 248 new parking spaces benefit our residents as opposed to commuters?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Mayor's election manifesto included a commitment to provide 'one-hour free parking for customers stopping to shop at our markets' as part of a package of pledges to support our local economy.</p> <p>This commitment is also reflected in the council's new Strategic Plan, which includes an action to introduce one-hour free parking at markets.</p> <p>There will be a benefit to drivers who want to visit the markets, particularly if they are purchasing heavy or bulky items.</p> <p>It is acknowledged the introduction of the Elizabeth Line will support those wishing to travel to Whitechapel Market and the introduction of sixteen new spaces to support shoppers will be a mixture of new Pay by Phone bays and the use of under used business bays within the area, therefore not affecting any local residents. The remainder of 232 bays around the other markets are a mixture of shared use bays and pay by phone bays that are already in situ therefore do not negatively affect residents as they are still able to park as they have always been.</p>
<p><b>11.23</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Musthak Ahmed/Ahmod ul Kabir</b></p>	<p>How many headteacher posts (including the academies) do we have in the borough and how many of them are from ethnic minority backgrounds? Does the council have a strategy to tackle the under-representation of British Bangladeshi teachers in headteacher posts by 2026?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Council does not currently hold this information in respect of all schools in the borough, however work is already underway to collect this data. That action is one part of the Council's Race Inequality Action Plan to drive up the diversity of leadership in our schools, in relation to Headteachers, other Senior Leadership roles in schools, as well as in relation to School Governors.</p>

		<p>However, this Mayor is committed to empowering BAME teachers in leadership positions and will work officers and Teaching organisations to ensure that these imbalances are addressed.</p>
11.24	<p><b>Question from Councillor Peter Golds</b></p>	<p>For many years there has been growing concern regarding illegal cycling in the Greenwich Foot Tunnel which is dangerous pedestrians and the disabled and the erratic provision of lifts. Will the Mayor consult with the Council of Royal Greenwich who are responsible for the lifts and ensuring safety in the tunnel to maintain the safety of pedestrians and ensure improved lift provision.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The existing byelaws governing use of Greenwich Foot Tunnel date back to 1912 and require updating to reflect modern usage and provide an effective legal framework for enforcement. Officers understand that Greenwich had been leading on proposals to amend the byelaws, subject to agreement from Tower Hamlets Council but have not received any recent correspondence on this issue.</p> <p>With regards to maintenance of the lifts, Greenwich Council advise that they were repaired during the Spring of 2022. Officers at Greenwich Council advise that due to the age of the lifts, sourcing replacement parts is increasingly an issue, and longer term it is likely that both lifts will need to be replaced completely, although this would be dependent on funding.</p> <p>In the meantime, officers continue to liaise regularly with Greenwich Council on a regular basis and raise issues relating to operation and maintenance of the lift tunnels as and when required.</p>
11.25	<p><b>Question from Councillor Nathalie Bienfait</b></p>	<p>What is the administration doing to hold housing associations to account? I am aware the Mayor and Lead Member recently met senior Clarion representatives. Could you give an indication of what you talked about, and what consequences you would consider imposing on housing associations to ensure high quality living for their residents?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p>

		<p>The Mayor has met with key housing providers in a series of 1:1 meetings to discuss delivery and management issues and continues to meet with Registered Providers (RPs) where performance issues are raised.</p> <p>The Mayor thus far has held a total of 9 meetings with RPs with more scheduled to take place over the coming months. These meetings have been either by way of introduction to discuss current stance, performance, concerns, and business aspirations. As well as focussed meetings with landlords regarding specific causes for concern such as casework, leaseholder charges, to name just a few.</p> <p>The meeting held with Clarion on 11th of October was held primarily to discuss the Cyber-attack upon Clarion's IT infrastructure which occurred on June 18th causing extensive damage to their business IT infrastructure.</p> <p>As a result, residents were left unable to access repairs, escalate, lodge or process complaints, pay rent, and left concerned their personal data had been exposed. Clarion had to work offline for over 12 weeks and gradually restore systems.</p> <p>An update was given around several key areas including progress in reconnecting the customer contact centre, billing of rents/services charges as well as resident engagement.</p> <p>In addition to the cyber-attack other agenda items included the decant and next steps in relation to Clare House, potential development opportunities as well the outcome and next steps following a recent investigation by the Ombudsmen.</p> <p>The Mayor and Lead member will continue discussions with Clarion on this situation, around performance ensuring where necessary improvement plans are in place to take forward priorities to ensure decent living standards for residents.</p> <p>It is imperative we have a positive and collaborative relationship around improvement, one of the ways in which this is implemented is via the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF). The THHF Executive and sub-groups work on salient projects relevant within the housing sector, as well as support the council</p>
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		<p>to deliver strategic housing targets. Although the council does not retain regulatory authority over RP's, should progress not be forthcoming the council can consider more firmer steps such as considering a referral to the regulator or holding focused meetings to encourage better standards of practice in perpetuity.</p>
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