

## Item 11: Member Questions and Answers

11.1	<p><b>Question from Councillor Kamrul Hussain</b></p>	<p>Can the Lead member provide an update on the council's outstanding accounts which were left unsigned for 6 consecutive years under the previous administration.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>All accounts up to and including 2019/20 have been signed off. The 3 remaining outstanding years (2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23) have now all been published and are expected to be signed off by the auditors by September 2024.</p>
11.2	<p><b>Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin</b></p>	<p>Residents have heard rumours that the administration is planning to turn the Stebondale Street football pitches, in to floodlit pitches available for hire until 9pm at night. Please could the administration confirm what their plans are for the Stebondale pitches.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The council is currently looking at the feasibility of installing a 9V9 3G Pitch at Stebondale, in partnership with the Football Foundation. This will replace the existing under-utilised area. The proposed facility will include floodlights and will allow the council to deliver a targeted community sport programme for Women and Girls groups, Young people, etc. We are currently at an early stage of the feasibility, focusing on the logistics of installing such a facility. Once we know that an artificial pitch is feasible, we will start the consultation process with local residents and potential user groups, and then develop an operational plan accordingly which will include hours of use etc. Initial indicative designs are expected soon, and we anticipate beginning consultation exercises from the end of May onwards.</p>

11.3

**Question from  
Councillor Musthak  
Ahmed**

Can the Lead Member update us on progress with the recommendations following the LGA Corporate Peer Review which took place in September last year?

**Response**

The Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (LGA CPC) for the Council in September 2023. The report, published in December acknowledged the many positive aspects of the organisation's performance and the motivated and focused staff who work for it. The report made 18 core recommendations. These and over 70 suggestions for improvement or review embedded within the text of the LGA CPC report were brought together to comprise the content of the Council's initial response as set out in its LGA CPC action plan. This was also published in December three months earlier than required as it was considered important to demonstrate the Council's commitment to improvement. Doing so did not inhibit the contribution of others to the plan over the following weeks and months as the Action Plan is a live document and additional actions can be identified and added at any time. It did however ensure that the Council's commitment to addressing every issue highlighted by the Peer Review was transparently made and set to a timetable. All political groups and single representatives of Parties represented within the Council were briefed on the findings of the review and the action plan by the Chief Executive and all Parties continue to be free to suggest additional content.

A considerable amount of progress has and continues to be made in delivering against the actions identified. Priority focus fell on a number of critical problem areas of governance that had persisted for a number of years. These covered areas such as the backlog of council accounts awaiting external auditor sign off and the absence of published annual governance statements. These were critical issues that were identified in the Action Plan and have all now been addressed. This report sets out progress to date.

		<p><b>Overall Progress.</b></p> <p>39% of the total number of actions identified by the Plan have now been completed. All of the listed actions have been completed for 17% of the core recommendations (3 of 18). The Council is on track to have completed 65% of all currently listed actions by the end of May and 85% by August 2024. The LGA CPC team will be returning in August to review progress. If additional actions are added these estimated completion rates may change. All target dates within the Plan may be subject to movement as individual projects develop.</p>
<p><b>11.4</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Asma Islam</b></p>	<p>Could the Mayor inform me as to whether he has been in communication with Peabody HA? Peabody tenants across the borough have written to me expressing alarm about dramatic increases to service charges – With many tenants also raising poor quality maintenance and substandard conditions?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Peabody is an independent housing association with a Chief Executive that is accountable to residents and the Chair of the Peabody Board.</p> <p>The Mayor and council are passionate about ensuring residents receive a good quality of service and are committed to continue working with social housing providers to ensure that residents receive good quality housing services, and we will continue to work with them to understand residents' concerns and to offer support.</p>
<p><b>11.5</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed</b></p>	<p>Can the Lead Member share how much it cost the taxpayer to unsuccessfully take one of our MPs - Apsana Begum to court? Can he explain how this represented Best Value?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p>

		<p>The costs of prosecuting Apsana Begum MP were:  £18,261.00 for external counsel;  £14,899 for the investigation team;  £55,457.50 for Legal services.</p> <p>It should be noted that the legal and investigation cost are internal costs, rather than expenditure, and legal services' time is permitted to be charged out at a rate in excess of the lawyer's salaried hourly rate.</p> <p>With respect to whether this reflect best value, the Council is under a duty to protect the public purse. Social housing fraud is particularly prevalent in London and within the borough. When prosecuting offences, the Council follows the Code for Crown Prosecutors and prosecutes only where the evidential and public interest tests are met. The former test is that, viewed objectively, a court is more likely than not to convict the alleged offender. The public interest looks at matters such as the type of offence, the impact of such offending on the community, the likely sentence on conviction, and similar. The case was kept under review in accordance with the Code. It is impossible to predict the outcome of any prosecution and prosecutions may fail for any number of reasons. It would have been remiss of the Council to not prosecute Ms. Begum in circumstances where the tests in the Code for Crown Prosecutors were met.</p>
<p><b>11.6</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Amy Lee</b></p>	<p>Can the lead member explain why there has been a delay to free community care? And when residents can expect Aspire to deliver on a key manifesto promise?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Mayor's Manifesto made a pledge to return to universal free homecare within the life of this administration. We are on track to do that, with plans underway to introduce free community care from the financial year 2025-2026. This is a realistic and achievable date for implementation given the planning required to implement this change</p>

		including updating the charging policy, changes to the financial assessment process on IT systems, training and communications to residents, staff, and partners.
11.7	<b>Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury</b>	<p>Mr Speaker can the Lead Member tell us what steps have been taken to collect the money owed to the Council, from the Rich Mix Centre. The Rich Mix was loaned a substantial amount of taxpayers money under a previous Labour administration, and it is understood whilst this loan remains unpaid more money was given to the organisation under the last Mayor. It will help to provide precise figures and an explanation as to how this constituted Best Value?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>A verbal response was provided and is set out in the main minutes.</p>
11.8	<b>Question from Councillor Asma Begum</b>	<p>Could the lead member inform me as to how the insourcing of THH and Leisure services will affect the council's commitment to reach net-zero by 2030?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The insourcing of the leisure service and THH gives the council opportunity to incorporate the council's net zero carbon ambitions into our housing and leisure asset strategies. There are grants available from the government to part-fund decarbonisation of both social housing and other council buildings, although the level of funding available is not sufficient to meet the total cost. As part leisure insourcing programme, the council's property and major programmes team have commissioned detailed condition surveys of our leisure facilities and developed a 10-year asset investment plan. This includes the replacement of existing heating systems and so there is an opportunity to consider the most appropriate and cost-effective way of incorporating net zero carbon technology. In terms of the council's</p>

		housing stock, surveys have been completed across the housing portfolio and opportunities to reduce emissions have been identified.
11.9	<b>Question from Councillor Harun Miah</b>	<p>Mr Speaker, I want to start by thanking the Police, council and community groups for keeping our borough safe and cohesive despite attempts by a minority to portray Tower Hamlets as a No-Go area - which is utter rubbish.</p> <p>Can the Lead Member share feedback from the council's Tension Monitoring Group in relation to the Palestine Flags, can he tell us how many complaints have been received and what action was taken?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Tension Monitoring Group has existed for several years and has been critical in managing tensions that emerge in the community due to local, national, and international incidents. Since the start of the conflict in the middle east, the Tension Monitoring Group has discussed matters arising from the placement of flags and a number of different views have been expressed in the meetings.</p> <p>There have been approximately 346 queries/complaints since October 2023. The action taken was determined on an individual basis depending on the context of the placement.</p>
11.10	<b>Question from Councillor Rebakah Sultana</b>	<p>Could the lead member update us on the progress of the Council's Women's commission and inform us how it will work in relation to the operations of the council?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Women's Commission was formally launched during International <u>Women's Day Awards Ceremony</u> on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024.</p>

The focus of the Commission is to work as a partnership to identify the key issues for women in the borough and to produce a report setting out recommendations for consideration by the Council and partners. This will ensure that women's voices are heard and support them to take up positions of influence and leadership in the community.

The Commission will focus on the following areas of inequalities faced by women in the borough:

- High Unemployment.
- Health Inequalities including maternity care.
- Community/women's Safety
- Lack of females in leadership positions.

#### **How the Commission will work**

- **Commissioners** The council will appoint ten commissioners based on their skills and experience and ensuring diverse representation reflective of the community. Three residents representatives will be recruited through an open recruitment process which includes application and interviews. The application for resident commissioners opened on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024 and closed on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2024. We have received really positive response with 32 applications. Shortlisting is underway. The shortlisting and interviews are being led by the Mayor's Advisor on Women and Equalities alongside officers from Mayor's Office. The resident commissioners will support engagement with a diverse range of women reflecting the diversity of women in the borough.
- **Call-for evidence** – invite women to submit written submissions on issues impacting them.
- **Thematic Commission meetings - Local** organisations will be asked to be part of the big conversation and we will consider what can be learnt from best practice.
- **Focus Groups** – Commissioners to meet with a diverse range of women across the borough. This will add richer,

		<p>greater depth to our understanding and help inform and steer the formal evidence sessions and shape recommendations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Draft recommendations &amp; Report</b> – The Commission will report its findings and recommendations to the Council and partners</li> </ul> <p><b>Commission Findings:</b></p> <p>The Council consider the recommendations from the Commission and a fully costed action plan will then be developed to deliver against the recommendations. As part of the engagement work on the Commission the draft recommendations will be the subject of further consultation with relevant stakeholders to ensure they are smart and deliverable and help address the recommendations of the Commission. The action plan will be developed by the Council and agreed at Cabinet.</p>
11.11	<p><b>Question from Councillor Ahmodur Khan</b></p>	<p>Can the Lead Member provide an update with timelines on the insourcing of Tower Hamlets leisure services from GLL?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Please see below timelines for insourcing Leisure Centres across to LBTH.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GLL (Better Leisure) contract finishes – Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April</li> <li>• LBTH – Be Well contract starts – Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May</li> <li>• Welcome event at York Hall – Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May</li> <li>• All Leisure Centres closed for mobilisation – Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May – Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May</li> <li>• Communications and launch event – Mile End Leisure Centre &amp; Stadium – Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May</li> </ul>



11.12

**Question from  
Councillor Shubo  
Hussain**

Could the lead member inform me of what steps are being taken to communicate with residents regarding the changes to leisure services and reassure them that they will still receive the same services in the interim?

**Response**

Please see below details of communications sent to residents and members regarding the insourcing of Leisure Centres.

- From 10 March, Our East End article circulated highlighting the justifications for insourcing, what the changeover process will involve and upcoming offers
- From 27 March 'coming soon' webpage live on the Be Well website with clear FAQs on the changeover process for memberships and direct debits etc
- From end of March/across April, messaging across social media channels, resident, member and headteachers newsletters and council WhatsApp group, on the new brand, changeover process and directing to FAQs
- From 27 March Be Well inbox/contact form open for queries
- On 28 March, joint GLL/Be Well newsletter sent out to members detailing upcoming changeover process
- On 1 April, leisure insourcing article on the LBTH website on the new service, brand and offers – subsequently promoted across social platforms
- On 1 April, LBTH insourcing webpage for residents updated
- W/c 22 April, coming soon campaign launched across Be Well social media channels signposting to all relevant information for the next few months – including paid promotion and Google Ads
- W/c 22 April, messaging across external digital screens (Idea Stores, Town Hall, Youth Centres, Family hubs etc)
- W/c 29 April, WhatsApp groups content and assets to be shared, plus continued social promotion

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On 29 April, second joint mailer GLL/Be Well newsletter sent out to members detailing upcoming changeover process</li> <li>• Block bookers mailer sent out</li> <li>• From 7 May, official launch campaign rolled out across social media platforms and newsletters.</li> </ul>
<p><b>11.13</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Abdul Malik</b></p>	<p>Can the lead member provide an update on the outcome of refreshed Local Plan consultation and if possible, outline any significant changes which will help bring investment and the delivery of affordable housing?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Local Plan has a number of statutory requirements over the 3 years it takes to produce. We are making good progress with the drafting and consultation milestones and are on track to submit to the Secretary of State in February 2025, with the aim of adopting later the same year.</p> <p><b>Consultation:</b></p> <p>In Nov-Dec 2023 the Local Plan team undertook a 6-week consultation on the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan. This consultation used a combination of in person and online events alongside use of print and social media to engage widely with our residents, statutory consultees and other stakeholders. The feedback received through the consultation has been used to shape the emerging Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan. A Consultation Statement which summarises in fuller, the details of the Regulation 18 consultation will be published alongside the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan.</p> <p><b>Delivering affordable housing:</b></p> <p>Through the Reg 18 consultation there were numerous comments on the Local Plan, including for housing and site allocations (which</p>

		<p>include housing as a key use). There were no significant changes required to housing policies in light of comments.</p> <p>To recap, the policy position is to ensure a deliverable land supply for new homes over the plan period and to attain the highest level of affordable housing requirement possible. The emerging Local Plan will include over 30 allocated sites, each with a capacity to deliver above 500 new homes. These allocated sites offer investment security for their development and delivery. The Plan’s affordable housing requirement increases to 40% from the 35% as is required by the adopted Local and London Plan. In addition, a requirement of a higher proportion of social rental products (85% of all new affordable homes) and family size homes is also included. The development industry queried these requirements from a viability perspective, however they have been reviewed through a full viability assessment and are considered robust. Residents support these policies.</p> <p>To supplement both the site allocations and housing policies, refinement work has been undertaken on the Plan’s Tall Building Zone F. This is to ensure surety and the avoidance of land use tensions when bringing forward residential development within this zone.</p>
<p><b>11.14</b></p>	<p><b>Question from James King</b></p>	<p>What steps has the council taken to address the continuous vandalism of cars down Milligan Street and around Limehouse Causeway and Narrow Street?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Police and the Council have received reports of vehicle crime and criminal damage in this location. Our officers are working closely with the Met Police to address this crime through the deployment of our resources, engagement with local residents and businesses to prevent and deter this criminality.</p> <p><b>We are:</b></p>

		<p>Sharing information and working in partnership with the Police to identify all the hotspot locations.</p> <p>Directing our Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers to carry out proactive targeted patrols to provide a visible presence, to prevent and deter any further incidents from occurring.</p> <p>Submitted a request through our joint operational tasking process with the Police for additional police resources to target this criminality. Liasing with residents &amp; local businesses to provide advice &amp; guidance on reporting crime to the Police.</p> <p>Offering advice on crime prevention methods along with obtaining any evidence to support the police with any criminal investigation/s. Utilising our CCTV - a deployable CCTV camera has been installed a known hotspot to help us capture evidence to support the criminal investigation.</p> <p>Utilising communications and messaging – posters and signs that will be installed in affected areas to remind residents to ensure their vehicles are locked and valuables are out of sight. The posters are designed to act as a deterrent for perpetrators who wish to commit car crime in that location.</p>
<p><b>11.15</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Ahmodul Kabir</b></p>	<p>Last Ramadan there were numerous complaints of anti-social behaviour, illegal trading and people fighting in the streets at the back of East London Mosque during and after night prayers. We saw videos of young people wielding machetes and terrified women and children running into the mosque for safety. Can the Lead Member set out what action will be taken to prevent the scenes we saw last year and stop prohibited activities in the vicinity?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p>

Prior to the Holy month of Ramadan this year, we worked in partnership with East London Mosque, Police, stakeholders, and other key partners to co-produce an operational action plan to address the ASB. These proactive and preventative measures ensured that everyone was able to enjoy a safe and peaceful Ramadan.

**Our Plan included:**

The identification of those responsible for the land where the illegal street trading had historically taken place. Proactive engagement and early communications with them.

Offering crime prevention and reporting ASB/crime advice for residents and visitors in advance - leaflets were produced and distributed prior to & during Ramadan advising people on how they can stay safe and report incidents of ASB & Crime to the Council and the Police.

The Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers and the Police provided a highly visible and reassuring presence around the Whitechapel area to prevent any ASB occurring in the first place.

The parking enforcement team were active in ensuring that any vehicles parked illegally and dangerously were addressed and/or towed away. This helped with the flow of traffic.

We have received positive feedback about the work and all actions taken from the local community, local women in the community, the worshippers and from ELM as well.

Plans are already progressing for next year's Holy month of Ramadan. The Council is currently considering and is consulting on the possibility of a new 'Public Space Protection Order' to further address and prevent issues arising next year.

<p><b>11.16</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Abdal Ullah</b></p>	<p>Could the Lead Member consider whether a dog park could be installed at Wapping Rose Gardens? Residents have written to me suggesting that a designated space for dogs would benefit the whole community with our canine friends being able to exercise in a space for them and residents reassured that their green spaces are clean and safe for everyone.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>A response was provided to Cllr Ullah in August 2023 to advise that whilst Wapping Gardens and Rose Gardens are popular areas for dog walking, there are processes that would need to be followed for us to consider creating a dog exercise area. This would include conducting a consultation and identifying capital funding.</p> <p>We have advised that should a dog exercise area be implemented then presently there would be no legal requirement for dog users to use the facility.</p> <p>Currently the Council is undertaking a review of dog control measures. Recommendations from this review will be subject to wider Council approval and will inform any future enforcement measures that may be implemented in parks and open spaces. Therefore, it is recommended that this review is concluded to inform any additional amenities / resources invested into parks and open spaces.</p>
<p><b>11.17</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Bellal Uddin</b></p>	<p>Can the Lead Member provide an update on the regeneration of the Clichy Estate (known as HAP) which will see around 400 homes being built? It is understood the scheme has progressed significantly under the current Mayor and it will help to share where we are to date and work going forward.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p>

		<p>The HAP Regeneration Scheme near the Clichy Estate is the council's largest housing development. It will provide 407 much-needed new homes, a community centre and more. Significant progress has been made over the last year.</p> <p>An amended design has been prepared for the scheme and a planning application submitted in March incorporating the latest building safety standards announced by the Government in 2023, requiring all flats have a secondary means of escape and other measures to improve fire safety. The proposed community centre is also relocated, to become a stand-alone facility, making it better suited to the community's needs.</p> <p>A procurement exercise is currently underway to select a developer partner to take the scheme forward into the construction phase and an appointment is expected this summer. This will then see an initial announcement of a developer being appointed that will enable demolition take place in 2024.</p>
<p><b>11.18</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Rachel Blake</b></p>	<p>Can the lead member inform me what is the average waiting time for housing OT assessments in each of past two years please?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The most recent figures available confirm that the current average waiting time for a Housing Occupational Health assessment is 4.5 months with the longest being 8 months and the shortest being less than a week.</p> <p>Waiting times can be influenced by a number of factors including residents' availability to inspect and information requests from health professionals.</p>

		<p>Occupational Therapists also undertake additional duties related to council new build; input on planning applications, site visits and accompanied viewings for residents on Project 120.</p> <p>The service has recently recruited 2 x apprentices to provide admin support to free up Occupational Therapist time to concentrate on assessments.</p> <p>A planned service restructure/review will examine increased capacity in this area.</p>
11.19	<p><b>Question from Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled</b></p>	<p>I understand the independent investigation, initiated by 31 members of staff, into housing management across housing options and homelessness has concluded, can the Lead Member share the findings and recommendations?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Julie Lorraine (CD Resources) is currently actively in discussions with the trade unions and staff to ensure that recommendations lead to actions which meet the needs of the staff and sustainably support their wellbeing.</p>
11.20	<p><b>Question from Councillor Sabina Akhtar</b></p>	<p>Could the lead member inform me of progress of development of the Clichy Estate?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The HAP Regeneration Scheme near the Clichy Estate is the council's largest housing development. It will provide 407 much-needed new homes, a community centre and more. Significant progress has been made over the last year.</p> <p>An amended design has been prepared for the scheme and a planning application submitted in March incorporating the latest</p>



		<p>building safety standards announced by the Government in 2023, requiring all flats have a secondary means of escape and other measures to improve fire safety. The proposed community centre is also relocated, to become a stand alone facility, making it better suited to the community's needs.</p> <p>A procurement exercise is currently underway to select a developer partner to take the scheme forward into the construction phase and an appointment is expected this summer. This will then see an initial announcement of a developer being appointed that will enable demolition take place in 2024.</p>
<p><b>11.21</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Sirajul Islam</b></p>	<p>Could the lead member inform me of whether the council is communicating with relevant partners and reassuring THCH residents now that the proposed merger with Poplar Harca has reportedly ended?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The lead member has met with Poplar HARCA and is due to meet with lead representatives of THCH alongside the Mayor in the forthcoming weeks.</p> <p>Post meeting with THCH the council will endeavour to publish a more robust and comprehensive statement for residents once further information and clarity has been sought from all parties involved. The council will discuss the ramifications for the residents as well as the next steps for both landlords.</p> <p>For the interim the council has updated the merger statement on the webpage as of 18<sup>th</sup> April for borough residents.</p> <p>In addition, both Landlords have updated their websites and social media channels informing residents of the dissolution of merger and provided FAQ links to reassure residents concerned.</p>

11.22	<p><b>Question from Councillor Marc Francis</b></p>	<p>Will the Mayor and Lead Member update Full Council on the action that has been taken in the past two years to improve the safety of pedestrians and cyclists at the mini roundabout at the junction of Tredegar Road and Fairfield Road?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>We are committed to improving the safety of pedestrians and cyclists throughout the borough.</p> <p>During the Liveable Street Bow programme, a scheme for the Tredegar Road / Fairfield Road was developed. Since the project was cancelled, no further plans have been made to implement changes at the junction.</p> <p>This location is not currently on any work programmes. However, given the volume of traffic and potential for crossing improvements, this is a location we can revisit to consider inclusion as part of future works programmes, subject to agreement and securing of funding.</p>
11.23	<p><b>Question from Councillor Peter Golds</b></p>	<p>Would the Mayor confirm as to whether there were discussions between the administration, either members or officers or both, and the Regulator with respect to the proposed merger between THCH and Poplar Harca?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Although there was no direct contact made with RSH, when the proposed merger was made public, the Mayor wrote a formal letter asking for the regulator to dissuade THCH joining a larger housing organisation solely determined by a fiscal rationale.</p> <p>The Mayor reiterated resident's feelings were a key aspect in any merger where proposed as the only viable outcome. The Mayor noted</p>

numerous residents indicated to him they were fearful of their voices being diluted or becoming absent if THCH were amalgamated into a much larger organisation.

Additionally, the Mayor stated any incoming landlord must ensure promises made are kept. Thus, establishing trust and confidence in residents who at present feel they have been provided with an enduring substandard housing service.