

Item 11: Member Questions and Answers

11.1	<p>Question from Councillor Amin Rahman</p>	<p>Could the Lead member provide an update on the council's outstanding accounts requiring sign off? These accounts were left unsigned for 6 years under the previous administration.</p> <p>Response</p> <p>All previous outstanding accounts from 2016/17 to 2019/20 have been prepared, published, inspected as required, and signed off by the external auditor. The accounts for 2020/21, 2021/22, and 2022/23 have also been prepared and published and are now awaiting audit opinions. For the first time in several years, the 2023/24 accounts were published on time, meeting the statutory deadline of 31st May 2024. See table below:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="512 808 1497 1346"> <thead> <tr> <th>Financial Year</th> <th>Due date (for submission to the auditors)</th> <th>Publication date of draft</th> <th>Public inspection date completion</th> <th>Date audited accounts approved</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2023-24</td> <td>31/5/24</td> <td>31/5/24</td> <td>12/7/24</td> <td>With EY</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022-23</td> <td>31/5/23</td> <td>2/2/24</td> <td>15/3/24</td> <td>With Deloitte</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021-22</td> <td>31/5/22</td> <td>18/1/24</td> <td>7/3/24</td> <td>With Deloitte</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020-21</td> <td>31/7/21</td> <td>27/2/22</td> <td>10/3/22</td> <td>With Deloitte</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019-20</td> <td>31/8/20</td> <td>28/8/20</td> <td>12/10/20</td> <td>30/11/23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018-19</td> <td>31/5/19</td> <td>31/5/19</td> <td>12/7/19</td> <td>30/11/23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017-18</td> <td>31/5/18</td> <td>1/6/18</td> <td>13/7/18</td> <td>31/7/18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016-17</td> <td>30/6/17</td> <td>30/6/17</td> <td>11/8/17</td> <td>27/9/17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2015-16</td> <td>30/6/16</td> <td>30/6/16</td> <td>11/8/16</td> <td>27/9/17</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Financial Year	Due date (for submission to the auditors)	Publication date of draft	Public inspection date completion	Date audited accounts approved	2023-24	31/5/24	31/5/24	12/7/24	With EY	2022-23	31/5/23	2/2/24	15/3/24	With Deloitte	2021-22	31/5/22	18/1/24	7/3/24	With Deloitte	2020-21	31/7/21	27/2/22	10/3/22	With Deloitte	2019-20	31/8/20	28/8/20	12/10/20	30/11/23	2018-19	31/5/19	31/5/19	12/7/19	30/11/23	2017-18	31/5/18	1/6/18	13/7/18	31/7/18	2016-17	30/6/17	30/6/17	11/8/17	27/9/17	2015-16	30/6/16	30/6/16	11/8/16	27/9/17
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11.2	<p>Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin</p>	<p>The Mayor's Budget for 2024-25 included targets for generating income from the island's parks and open spaces. Could the Lead Member provide an update on these plans including what resident engagement has taken place or what is planned?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>There is an income target of £522k for the Arts, Parks and Events (APE) team for 2024-25. These were approved as part of a three-year income target of £854k in line with the MTFs period. The APE team manage the parks and open spaces across the borough including the spaces on the Island.</p> <p>The council does generate income from hiring out the sports pitches and this income contributes towards the income target as well.</p>																																																		

		<p>The council has an events hire policy and a Major events policy to guide any larger events. These would have a consultation process as part of the licensing process, giving local residents 28 days notice of any activity. Currently, there are no large event applications pending for any of the parks and open spaces on the Island.</p>
<p>11.3</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Ahmodul Kabir</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member feedback on progress with the recommendations following the LGA Corporate Peer Review that took place in September last year?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Local Government Association 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 response as set out in its LGA CPC action plan. This was also published in December.</p> <p>The Action Plan is a live document and additional actions can be identified and added at any time. 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. Following a suggestion by the LGA the Councils Transformation Advisory Board, Chaired by the Mayor, has taken on the role of advising and supporting the Council's CPC programme.</p> <p>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 prioritised by the LGA and identified in the Action Plan and have all now been addressed.</p> <p>58% of the total number of actions identified by the Plan have now been completed (up from 50% since the May 2024 update). All of the listed actions have been completed for 28% of the core recommendations (5 of 18). The Council is on track to have completed 73% of all currently listed actions by the end of August 2024. The LGA CPC team had been scheduled to return to review progress in August. They have recently advised of a delay as members of the review team will not now be available in August. We are looking to reschedule the revisit for the earliest date</p>

		possible. All target dates within the Plan may be subject to movement as individual projects develop.
11.4	Question from Councillor Marc Francis	<p>Further to the answer to my question at Full Council on 8th May confirming that the mayor cancelled the proposed changes at the junction of Fairfield Road and Tredegar Road to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists, will be Lead Member now instruct the Highways Team to implement these changes?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Officers are aware that the existing layout at the Fairfield Road and Tredegar Road junction could potentially be improved to improve pedestrian and cycle safety. This location had been considered previously as part of the Liveable Streets programme for the Bow area. Further plans to implement changes at the junction are not currently on any work programmes. However, officers will continue to explore opportunities for progressing designs and subsequent delivery for improving this junction, subject to available funding.</p>
11.5	Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	<p>I want to start by thanking the Mayor for delivering his manifesto pledge to create extra parking spaces in my ward Bromley South, especially on Devons Road and Empson Street. However, can the Lead Member tell us what he will do to help local residents who although grateful, have raised issues with the high curbs which can damage cars driving on to and off the raised parking spaces on Empson Street.</p> <p>Furthermore, I have seen there is more room for additional car parking spaces that could benefit my constituents.</p> <p>Response</p> <p>We have made good progress in rolling out additional residential parking spaces throughout the borough. In Bromley South we have completed additional parking facilities to Devons Road and Reeves Road in the Spring. Parking improvements in Empson Street have been designed and will be implemented on site from 22 July 2024. The project addresses the places where kerb height is excessively high by reducing this and making complimentary repairs to the adjacent footpaths.</p>
11.6	Question from Councillor Asma Islam	<p>Can the lead member update me on the progress of the changes being made to the housing options service?</p> <p>Response</p>

		<p>A full report was presented to cabinet on 10th July 2024, setting out the detail of the actions taken, and progress made to date following the additional investment of £1.93 million per annum agreed at the previous cabinet meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ending 43 temp / fixed term contracts and moving to permanent. • Hosted a successful recruitment drive for 30 new frontline operational roles, this first of 2 planned events attracted more than 500 attendees. • Hosted a webinar with a further 47 attendees about careers in our housing team • Completing and publishing a full staff feedback document setting out clear actions with allocated owners • Recruited an interim dedicated homelessness director. • Launched an internal recruitment programme for 2 specialist operational management roles.
11.7	<p>Question from Councillor Jahed Choudhury</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member provide an update on the current Best Value Inspection?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>On 22nd February the Secretary of State (SoS) for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities instigated a Best Value Inspection in Tower Hamlets</p> <p>‘to provide direct, independent assurance that the Authority is continuing to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness’...</p> <p>More to follow</p>
11.8	<p>Question from Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury</p>	<p>There has been an increase in knife and gun crime incidents over the last few weeks, including in Mile End, could the lead member inform me what the council is doing to prevent this?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Community Safety Partnership Plan for 2021-24 focuses on tackling violence and the root causes, with a priority area of ‘safeguarding those at risk of violence and exploitation’.</p> <p>With regard concerns around increase in the number of incidents, we can report that knife crime in June has actually decreased by 5.8% (49 reports)</p>

compared to the previous month where there were 52 reports. Knife crime with injury has decreased by 56.3% with 7 reports compared to 16 in May.

In respect of gun crime – there have been 5 more offences in June than were reported in May (11 compared to 6) but only one report involved a lethal barrelled discharge. Other firearm offences may include possession of imitation firearms and the increased use of ‘gel guns’.

In terms of the work that has been recently undertaken to prevent these offences this has been focused on partnership work with our community and young people.

For example:

- The two MyEnds projects within the Isle of Dogs and Bethnal Green areas, led by a consortium of partnership agencies, and supported by the council works in those areas and with young people impacted by violence and knife crime to directly tackle some of the key issues they face.
- Weapon sweeps carried out by police and partnership teams to remove knives stored in parks and estates to be used by individuals and criminal gangs and knife bins are placed throughout the borough to take knives off the streets. This is supported by police Safer Schools Officers engaging with students regarding the dangers of knife crime and how to keep safe.
- A new Violence Reduction Unit funded initiative to tackle after school robberies will be launched within the next 4 weeks by the Council and will see the deployment of a range of resources from community safety, the youth service, schools and police to tackle this issue.
- The Hospital Navigator who is based in A&E at the Royal London hospital works with young victims of violence, their families, offenders and other key partners to mitigate the causative factors of violence and divert young people away from crime.
- We work closely with our police colleagues who hold fortnightly ‘Precision Focused Performance Knife Crime Meetings’ that tackles emerging issues through the Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare process.
- A knife summit, “Knives Down: A Tower Hamlets Summit for Preventing Knife Crime,” will be held soon. This will be a unique and groundbreaking response to knife crime, with a charter enacted to clearly commit the local authorities' response to knife crime.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operation Continuum, a police intelligence-led operation targeting drug dealing and associated criminality, extends into gun crime. Run by the police and fully supported by Tower Hamlets Council, it has led to numerous arrests and convictions across the borough.
11.9	<p>Question from Councillor Suluk Ahmed</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member update the council on the work of the Women's Commission to date?</p> <p>Response</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Women's Commission was launched on 26th March 2024 2. The Commission has 4 key focus areas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment ▪ Health ▪ Women's Safety ▪ Women's Leadership 3. The Women's Commission hosted IWD Achievement Awards on the same day (26th March 2024). Celebrating the contribution and achievement of local women and acknowledging their tireless work and dedication in supporting local communities. 4. A dedicated Women's Commission Webpage has been launched on Council website, which will provide update information on all Commission activities. 5. 8 Female Commissioners have been appointed by the Mayor Tower Hamlets 6. An open and extensive recruitment campaign was conducted to recruit 2 Resident Women Commissioners, to be the voice of local women and supporting commissioners in driving this initiative. 7. The first inaugural meeting of the Women's Commission was hosted by CEO Stephen Halsey and Cllr Wahid Ali Cabinet Member for Customer Service, Equalities and Social Inclusion. Baroness Pola Uddin has been appointed Chair of Commission 8. A second meeting with the Commission has been held to finalise the Women's Commission's ToR and fully agree on the work plan. 9. A commissioners away day is scheduled for 20th July. 10. The First Stakeholders Evidence Gathering session is to be held In late July or early September 2024. 11. Further details available from here: Women's Commission (towerhamlets.gov.uk)
11.10	<p>Question from Councillor Amy Lee</p>	<p>There have been recent reports of a harrowing and complex court case that received attention from the national press, in which the council was named and criticised by the East London Family Court for its conduct in failing to protect a mother and her children. Can the lead member inform me as to</p>

		<p>how the council is responding to the instructions of the court and what actions it is taking to ensure that an incident like this does not happen again?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>We have accepted the outcome of the court order regarding this difficult case and are complying with the court order. The safety and wellbeing of families is our priority, and we are continuing to provide suitable support and intervention.</p>
11.11	Question from Councillor Iqbal Hossain	<p>Can the Lead Member update the council on the delivery of the Mayor's Education Maintenance Allowance and University Bursaries for the next academic year. It is understood from various media sources these provisions have not been delivered to date.</p> <p>Response</p> <p>For the upcoming academic year 2024/25, the application window will open in September 2024, with grants scheduled to be awarded from March 2025. Since the 2022/23 academic year, through the current application round of 2023/24, all eligible students who have met the criteria for the Mayor's Education Maintenance Allowance and University Bursary have successfully received or will receive grants.</p>
11.12	Question from Councillor Sabina Khan	<p>Would the chief executive provide council with the membership list of the LBTH Women's Commission</p> <p>Response</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chair - Baroness Manzila Pola Uddin 2. Vice chair - Cherifa Atoussi - Operational Manager at Account 3 3. Sufia Alom - Head of Programmes and Maryam Centre 4. Fatuma Hassan - Young Mayor Tower Hamlets 5. Safia Jama - CEO Women's Inclusive Team 6. Aneta Sabik - Special Needs Teacher & Community Organiser in TH 7. Kathleen McCarthy - Director of Queen Mary University Language Lab 8. Nazia Khatun - CEO of Fitness Reborn 9. Pamela Kakoy - Resident Women's Commissioner 10. Chiho Sharp - Resident Women's Commissioner
11.13	Question from Councillor Ahmodur Khan	<p>Can the Lead Member tell us how the council has ensured that the essential works required to Wood Wharf School will be completed on time and within budget given the historic issues with delivering these works?</p>

		<p>Response:</p> <p>LBTH Capital Delivery have undertaken a procurement process alongside the LBTH Procurement Team to ensure that a suitably sized contractor who is familiar with working within a distressed environment have been appointed. This contract has been agreed on a fixed price design and build basis.</p> <p>The contractor has commenced on site on the 17th June and is working collaboratively with both LBTH and Mulberry Trust (the School Operator) to ensure a phased occupation is achieved and therefore ensuring that the September 2024 pupil intake requirement is being facilitated.</p> <p>There is recognition from all parties that this programme is challenging, however, the contractor has had early and transparent engagement with the Approved Inspector who will be providing building control sign-offs to ensure all risks are mitigated so far as reasonably practical. The Capital Delivery Team continue to monitor this process with weekly progress meetings.</p> <p>A number of site visits between LBTH, the contractor and Mulberry Trust have taken place on site in order to ensure all items are being coordinated transparently. The most recent site visit took place the morning of Tuesday 9th July.</p>
11.14	<p>Question from Asma Begum</p>	<p>Would the lead member consider meeting with Victoria Park Friends in order to receive feedback and coordinate how they can work together during and after the summer festival season.</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Lead Member will arrange a meeting with the Friends of Victoria Park in Autumn to talk about the various activities at Victoria Park including the summer festival and other opportunities.</p>
11.15	<p>Question from Councillor Abdul Mannan</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member update the council on what is being done to tackle the worrying levels of crime and ASB in and around Rounton Road?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Empowering Communities and Fighting Crime is one of the top priorities for the Mayor. As one of the lead agencies in tackling crime and ASB, the Council are at the forefront of ensuring safety, security, and quality of life for our residents and visitors.</p>

		<p>The ASB Team work very closely with a range of partners and key stakeholders, including the police, different council departments, drug and alcohol support agencies and registered social landlords to help us breakdown and resolve issues around ASB and Crime via a multi-agency approach.</p> <p>Each area has a designated THEO and SCO team to conduct local patrols in hot spot areas and locations of concern to identify alleged perpetrators and to take appropriate enforcement action against them and to prevent and deter ASB by conducting hi-visibility patrols within the area. THEO/SCO are tasked to the areas via the intel that we receive from our ASB reporting systems along with Police data, the information is then discussed in our cluster tasking meeting and tasked appropriately.</p> <p>We have received very few reports from residents or directly from our THEO patrols regarding ASB in the vicinity of Rounton Road and surrounding areas. However, in April 2024, the council received four enquiries from residents concerning an increase in crime and ASB on Swaton Road and nearby streets which covers Rounton Road area. The ASB officer initiated a formal investigation into these issues. The ASB officer completed preliminary assessments, conducted risk evaluations, and coordinated action plans in collaboration with Poplar Harca Housing Association, as the main problems were within their managed properties. Poplar Harca are exploring what action they can take to address the issues as the landlord responsible. Additionally, the designated THEO enforcement team were assigned to patrol the area, address any incidents, and share intelligence with relevant partners. The ASB officer also communicated with the local Safer Neighbourhood Police Team and requested increased patrols in the area which have been occurring over recent weeks.</p> <p>We strongly encourage all residents to report ASB/Crime to the Police and the council so we can take the appropriate action to resolve the issues as they arise.</p>
11.16	<p>Question from Councillor Amina Ali</p>	<p>Could the lead member inform me as to how many residents have been able to access the new council tax relief scheme?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>150 claims have been received with 144 processed and 39 awards made with a value of £1,102.91. 105 claims didn't qualify.</p>
11.17	<p>Question from Councillor Abdul Malik</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member update us on the decision taken last September to open up our roads?</p> <p>Response</p>

		<p>The decision that we took at September 2023 Cabinet to withdraw from aspects of the Liveable Streets programme is subject to a judicial review. The legal case was due to be heard in the Summer. This case has been deferred to November 2024.</p>
11.18	<p>Question from Councillor Rebakah Sultana</p>	<p>Could the lead member inform me how many bin collections have been missed in the last 12 months?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Waste services make 4,095,294 collections in a year, of which 99.6% are collected on time. There have been 15,119 missed collections in the last 12 months. The missed collections are attributed to various challenges including access to estates, access to bins and parked vehicles blocking access.</p>
11.19	<p>Question from Councillor Harun Miah</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member set out what action is being taken to address traffic issues on Whitethorn Street which is a very narrow two-way road with parking on both sides?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The revised options to improve traffic flow and for parking arrangements in Whitehorn Street and Fern Street are currently going through design and internal approvals. We aim to carry out a local consultation after which the preferred solution may be delivered later in the Summer/ Autumn 2024.</p>
11.20	<p>Question from Councillor Shubo Hussain</p>	<p>Many residents have contacted me worried about increased costs for their leisure services and loss of access to other leisure facilities – could the lead member inform me as to how many people have cancelled their memberships and does the council have any mitigation measures to retain customers who may consider leaving?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Since the Be Well leisure service came in-house on 1st May, 3,545 new members have joined (as of 5th July) with 1,999 leaving. This represents a net gain of 1,546 new members and a total of 17,730 total members across the 6 leisure facilities. This is better than expected and encouraging performance.</p> <p>The service is looking to set up a dedicated team to contact and encourage customers to remain as members as well as sign up new members.</p> <p>The prices of memberships have remained the same and represent better value for money for customers as they can be used at all of the council's</p>

		<p>leisure centres. Looking at the prices charged in neighbouring boroughs, prices in Tower Hamlets are between 15% and 30% cheaper for comparable memberships.</p> <p>We are also continuing to offer 1/3 discounts for a range of concession customers. This is in addition to the investing £248k on the new free-swimming programme for women and girls over 16 and men over 55 launched this month.</p> <p>Background information: - Price comparison information</p> <p>Be Well membership all facilities(adult): £42.50, concession: £32.90 LB Hackney (adult) all facilities (adult): £57.80, concession: £46.20 LB Newham (adult): £50.00, concession: £35.00 LB Islington (adult): £60.00, concession: £48.00</p>
11.21	Question from Councillor James King	<p>Could the lead member inform me as to whether there has been progress or discussions with the Tower Hamlets Archives regarding the need to protect the archives and ensure that they are in a suitable and secure space?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Discussions on the best way of ensuring the preservation of heritage assets for posterity at the Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives are ongoing. We are exploring a few options to ensure the balance between the financial investment and venue requirements are met. This includes exploring other sites to weigh up the option that would provide Best Value and meet the needs of the service.</p>
11.22	Question from Councillor Sirajul Islam	<p>Could the mayor inform me as to whether the council has been able to make progress on the release of LIF funding from TfL?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>We assume the question relates to Local Implementation Plan (LIP) funding. Officers have been able to secure an increase in TfL LIP funding for 2024-25 compared to the previous year and are liaising regularly with TfL officers on securing further funding for 2024-25 and future years from LIP.</p>
11.23	Question from Councillor Nathalie Bienfait	<p>I was recently shocked to learn that in the period between 1 April 2022 and 28 February 2023, we employed a total of 335 individuals with an average of 5214.80 hours were worked by staff on zero-hours contracts per month. How is the Administration is supporting workers on zero-hours contracts to</p>

		<p>ensure that they are given proper notice of cancelled shifts and for them to receive sick pay, and how it is working to bring all staff onto safer and more appropriate contracts?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Council issues zero hours contracts for staff who work on a casual or sessional basis as, and when needed, for certain job roles, for example, music and lifelong learning tutors and holiday play scheme workers. 85% of casual/sessional workers are tutors. Where there is work available, the relevant service will offer work and it is the decision of the worker as to whether they take the work offered. There is no obligation to accept the work offered and staff can work elsewhere for other employers.</p> <p>With regard to the figures provided in the question, they have been reviewed and updated as follows:</p> <p>As at June 2024, 311 staff were engaged on a casual basis, which is a slight decrease in the numbers reported between April 2022 and February 2023.</p> <p>Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, the average number of hours worked by casual/sessional staff per month were as follows:</p> <p>Minimum per month: 3049 Maximum per month: 7124.08 Average per month: 5226.85</p> <p>In relation to pay, all casual/sessional workers receive holiday pay. Whilst it is the responsibility of the Service to advise the Payroll Team whether any casual worker has been unable to carry out work due to sickness absence, HR colleagues advise managers that casual workers are to be paid sick pay if they are unable to work as scheduled. Additionally, HR colleagues advise managers to provide sufficient notice if shifts have to be cancelled, although this may be due to reasons beyond the control of the Service.</p> <p>A review of the management of hours worked by casual/sessional workers will be undertaken by the HR Department in conjunction with relevant managers as soon as is practicable, to ensure that the contractual nature of the workers' engagement is appropriate.</p>
11.24	<p>Question from Councillor Peter Golds</p>	<p>Has the council met or arranged to meet representatives of Transport for London with reference to the provision of bus routes in the borough, and in particular the threatened D7 route which is a vital link for Poplar, Cubitt Town and Island Gardens and Burdett Road.</p> <p>Response</p>

		<p>During 2022 TfL had been considering making changes to the bus network across London, including within Tower Hamlets, as part of the Central London bus review. Following a consultation and subsequent feedback from officers, Members and other local stakeholders TfL decided not to proceed with changes to the D7 and other local routes – see Central London bus review 2022 report.</p> <p>Officers continue to liaise regularly with the TfL buses team regarding opportunities for developing the network (e.g. Superloop routes) on a regular basis.</p>
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