

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL****HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2015****THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG****Members Present:**

Mayor Lutfur Rahman	Councillor Shafiqul Haque
Councillor Khaled Uddin Ahmed	Councillor Clare Harrison
Councillor Rajib Ahmed	Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Suluk Ahmed	Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Ohid Ahmed	Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Mahbub Alam	Councillor Aminur Khan
Councillor Shah Alam	Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Amina Ali	Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Shahed Ali	Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Craig Aston	Councillor Ayas Miah
Councillor Asma Begum	Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Rachel Blake	Councillor Md. Maium Miah
Councillor Chris Chapman	Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah
Councillor Dave Chesterton	Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury	Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim
Councillor Alibor Choudhury	Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Andrew Cregan	Councillor John Pierce
Councillor Julia Dockerill	Councillor Gulam Robbani
Councillor David Edgar	Councillor Candida Ronald
Councillor Marc Francis	Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs	Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Peter Golds	Councillor Andrew Wood

The Speaker of the Council, Councillor M. A. Mukit, MBE in the Chair

During the meeting the Council agreed to vary the order of business. To aid clarity, the Minutes are presented in the order that the items originally appeared on the agenda. Urgent motions, moved with the agreement of the Council, without notice, are listed at Item 13. The order the business was taken at the meeting was as follows:

- Item 12.3 – Motion regarding solidarity with French citizens.
- Item 1 - Apologies for absence.
- Item 2 – Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.
- Item 3 – Minutes.
- Item 4 – Announcements.
- Item 5 – Petitions.
- Item 6 – Public Questions.

- Item 7 – Mayor’s Report.
- Item 13.1 - Urgent Motion regarding Waste Management Strategy.
- Item 8 – Members Questions.
- Item 13.2 - Urgent Motion regarding Wasted Public Money.
- Item 9.1 – Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on matters referred by the Council.
- Item 12.2 - Motion regarding Docklands Sailing Centre.
- Item 13. 3 - Urgent Motion regarding Circle Housing Group & Old Ford Housing Association.

The Speaker of the Council opened the meeting and welcomed the Secretary of State Commissioners to the Council meeting.

Prior to commencing the Council’s formal business, the Speaker of the Council referred to the terrible events that took place in Paris two weeks earlier, when twelve people lost their lives as a result of terrorist actions. He invited the Council to stand and observe a minute’s silence in memory of those who died and in solidarity with the people of Paris.

Procedural Motion

Councillor Shiria Khatun **moved** and Councillor Rachael Saunders **seconded** a procedural motion “that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied such that Motion 12.3 ‘Motion regarding solidarity with French citizens’ be considered as the next item of business”. The motion was put to the vote and. subject to an amendment was **agreed**.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Abdul Asad and Councillor Oliur Rahman.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillor Marc Francis declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the Urgent Motion regarding Circle Housing Group & Old Ford Housing (item 13.3). This was on the basis that the Councillor was a Board Member of Old Ford Housing Association. The Councillor left the meeting for the consideration of this motion.

3. MINUTES**RESOLVED**

That the unrestricted minutes of the Council meeting held on 26 November 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and the Speaker be authorised to sign them accordingly.

4. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE SPEAKER OF THE COUNCIL

There were no announcements.

5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS**5.1 Petition regarding licensing in Poplar High Street, E14 .**

Mr Dulal Uddin addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners, presenting their revised petition as set out in the supplementary agenda; and responded to questions from Members.

Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Community Safety responded to the matters raised in the petition. Whilst sympathising with the petitioners cause, he explained that the matter had been determined by the Council's Licensing Sub-Committee in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

With the Speaker's permission, Councillor Amina Ali, the Chair of the Sub-Committee, explained that, in considering the application, the Sub-Committee had carefully considered all of the representations including those from the petitioner.

RESOLVED

That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Communities, Localities and Culture, for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

5.2 Petition entitled 'Stop G4S bidding contracts in Tower Hamlets'

Ms Tahsin Ahmed addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members.

Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources then responded to the matters raised in the petition. He expressed sympathy for the issues raised and explained that the Council was reviewing its ethical procurement policy to ensure that it was robust.

RESOLVED

That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Resources, for a written response on any outstanding matters within 28 days.

5.3 Petition entitled 'Count Tower Hamlets' Votes in Tower Hamlets!'

The Petition was not presented at the meeting due to the absence of the petitioner.

6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The following questions and in each case (except where indicated) a supplementary question were put, and were responded to by the relevant Executive Member:-

6.1 Question from Ms Margaret Bradley:

Why are the leaseholder services provided by Tower Hamlets Homes so dreadful?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing and Development.

Thank you Margaret for your question. First of all apologies on behalf of myself and the Administration for the way Tower Hamlets Homes have conducted themselves with you. The Leasehold Services Department at Tower Hamlets Homes has been performing poorly but when the Leasehold Service was with the Council it was quite severe as well. I understand your concerns about Tower Hamlets Homes' services particularly in light of the major works charges. I've already received 2 petitions in relation to the major works charges and how we can rectify our current policies to ensure people like yourselves are able to pay on a long term plan as well.

In terms of transparency and the quality of work that's taking place within Tower Hamlets Homes in relation to major works charges, I wanted to cite you an example. Previously before I became a Councillor, there was a particular block near where I lived where decent homes work took place under the pilot project. Subsequently those leaseholders came to see me a year and a half later and I instructed a surveyor to inspect the property and to make sure that the work that took place and the major works was correct.

Unfortunately it was found that the work that took place needed to be redone again because the repointing and several other things were not carried out by the contractor. Subsequently I pulled that contractor back in to address the concerns of the leaseholders and we're looking forward to actually addressing the fact that they can be compensated but that's a little example of the things that we're doing. In terms of service charges, that is also something that the Mayor and I discuss and as part of that pledge we're also developing the

dispute resolution panel which was actually in the borough at one time but got disbanded a few years ago well before I became a Councillor.

In terms of the dispute resolution panel this is something for you to take your service charges including the major works charges so that you can put your case forward as well. Including on top of that we also will be holding a referendum which is part of the Mayor's pledge to see whether or not leaseholders and tenants will judge whether or not the ALMO should stay outside or be bought back into the Council. And finally I hold surgeries; I would welcome you to come to my surgery so I can look at your concerns and make sure that you are charged correctly.

Summary of supplementary question from Ms Bradley

When you took over from the GLC which was in 1986 I believe up until we had the work done in 2011, you done nothing to our block. Absolutely nothing, although when I bought my flat it was down on there that you were supposed to do the work that we got charged for by about 2004. It's not the only thing I went and saw Councillor Aston last year about. I'm getting constant leaks from upstairs. Our Estate Officer doesn't seem to have a clue what her responsibilities are. I've had a leak now going on for about 7 months which is just about being sorted out finally. How do you expect us to pay a service charge when we get very little service?

Summary of Councillor Rabina Khan's response to the supplementary question

Thank you Margaret for the supplementary you were quite right. The GLC leases were very complex at the time and when it came to the Council it became more complicated as well. As an ex leaseholder myself, I understand the problems that you're facing in terms of service charges and major works charges as well.

In terms of the leak that you've experienced, one of the things I've realised is that with the Right to Buy that's been introduced in the borough again and all over the country, there is an increase of leaseholders. And the fact is we also need to look at policies whether or not we should have policies for resident leaseholders and an alternative policy for absentee leaseholders. Because it is often the commercial leaseholders who leave their tenants and who are responsible for the tenants. And it could be in your case it's an ex leaseholder who's got a tenant upstairs but in that case we do ought to look at policies whereby there is a different policy for resident leaseholders and commercial leaseholders as well.

And as I said before in terms of the service charges and in terms of what you're facing I would be more than willing to sit with you and go through the form of transparency that needs to be adhered to. And particularly the fact there may be the possibility of an additional surveyor to inspect the properties and why the work didn't take place since 1986.

6.2 Question from Mr P.B. Prasad:

We believe that the East End Homes (EEH) have not met their responsibilities under the terms and spirit of the transfer of stock agreement as outlined in the 34 clauses of the main documents which they signed back in 2006. They seem to have flouted the promise to make improvements to the Holland Estate. Despite this blatant disregard, the company – EEH – wishes to now demolish our homes to make a profit which we fully oppose and will fight against. We know that the Mayor Rahman and Tower Hamlets First is a listening administration and have a strong track record on housing related matters nationally. With this in mind, could the Executive Member shed some light on the conduct of EEH and their plans and whether the Council think that it is the right approach by East End Homes to deal with our housing stock and the local residents in such an irresponsible way?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Development.

Thank you Mr Prasad for bringing this petition to the Council. I understand from East End Homes that they are actually carrying out a survey and a consultation process in line with advice that they received from their Board that residents wanted regeneration to take place. This exercise has been continuing with a survey to consult with residents and leaseholders and East End Homes were asked to initiate that exercise in early 2014. While it was being undertaken, it emerged that many of the residents didn't want this to take place, that demolition wasn't wanted on the estate and we've been following this closely.

As I understand of today, no decision has been made in terms of demolition or regeneration of the Holland Estate. And I think what ought to be remembered is in our transfer document we did not agree to any demolition. It was only regeneration and that is the promise they ought to adhere to. And I promise you today, working with Councillors Robbani and Suluk, to ensure that we work with the residents of the Holland Estate so that your concerns are brought to light. And if you don't want the demolition that ought to be what was promised in the transfer document, that is what you ought to be entitled to.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr Prasad

Yes I'm very grateful to you for that but just about 3 weeks ago, there was a local board meeting and there were 15 board members present there. Out of 15, 13 people voted against that. This was recorded and still it was made very clear that we do not want any demolition and we wanted the withdrawal of Section 20 Notice. But they disregarded and they kept on saying that some residents want the demolition. We do not know who because you know we have conducted house to house meeting with all the residents and every single person, every single resident, leaseholder or the tenant they do not want the demolition. So if they have the board meeting and 13 members out of 15 voted against it, then the matter should have been dropped.

Summary of Councillor Rabina Khan's response to the supplementary question

I will be writing to East End Homes following this Council meeting to put the Council's viewpoint that, in the transfer document demolition was not agreed. It would only be regeneration. Demolition can only be agreed if the residents, leaseholders and tenants want it there as well. But as far as we're concerned from the Council, the transfer document clearly states no demolition, only refurbishment. So I hope that they will listen to us, but we will also be making sure that we have a meeting with them and make sure that your petition is submitted to them.

6.4 Question from Mr Mark Taylor:

Forced evictions when reporting or asking for repairs, unacceptable standards and rogue landlords continue to pose serious problems for tenants and renters and are negatively affecting many lives. The Coalition Government's welfare reform has exacerbated the situation. A great majority has experienced problems in their homes of damp, mould, leaking roofs or windows, electrical hazards, animal infestations and gas leaks. In its current state, the private rental market does not function to ensure that homes are let in a decent condition.

Could the Executive Members provide an update in relation to Tower Hamlets and the Council's Licensing Scheme to ensure such issues are being looked at and addressed in Tower Hamlets on a priority basis?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Development

Thank you Mark for bringing this important question to light. The fact that the law allows for a tenant to be thrown out of their home is simply disgraceful and I would further remark of how shameful it was to see the issue of Section 21 revenge evictions come before parliament in November and be filibustered away by wealthy Tory backbenchers so that a vote could not even be held. That was Tory class war in action and we need to remember that too many of our politicians will side with rogue landlords over ordinary people. However there ought to be a further debate actually between the responsibilities of the management agents as well as the landlords because currently the management agents are not regulated. We can't change the national situation but we can use whatever powers we have to ensure that we can do something better for the private rented sector in Tower Hamlets. It was agreed in September that consultation would begin on a Landlord Licensee Scheme and trials in pilot areas will be in operation this year. That consultation has already begun.

Summary of supplementary question from Mr Taylor

Rather than have your budget cut by millions, do you think that the Government should provide funding for local councillors to provide a tenancy

relation service to help vulnerable tenants and renters have a fair chance against unfair rogue landlords? How can a landlord register function without money to enforce it? Housing Benefit money paid to private sector renters has doubled in the past 10 years. The Government seems to be prepared to pay this money to private landlords. Will you ask the Mayor to write to the minister concerned to highlight the plight of affected people in Tower Hamlets?

Summary of Councillor Rabina Khan's response to the supplementary question

Thank you Mark indeed I agree with you. And in particular the Mayor and I will write as you requested. But it is important to remember that the current Tory Government doesn't seem to acknowledge the fact that they have the Bank of England Governor in a home which he gets an allowance for of about £1/4m and yet we have people in the private rented sector suffering so severely and yet there's no legislation to be able to challenge rogue landlords.

6.5 Question from Mr Azizur Rahaman:

How are the Government cuts affecting the people and Tower Hamlets Council? Could you give a full breakdown of cuts since 2010 by the Government and other funding bodies for the Council?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Thank you Mr Rahman. I want to start by reminding the chamber that this Government has failed everybody, especially the people of Tower Hamlets. It's economic policy has got us absolutely nowhere. There's been no growth whatsoever, businesses are suffering, employees are losing their jobs and people out there aren't getting a service. Furthermore their social policies stink.

They talked about Big Society. All we've got is broken society. They talked about rolling back the state so people could be independent. Instead they're rolling back the state so they can dish out contracts to big business at the expense of local business and small business. It's clear Mr Rahman that welfare reform hasn't worked. The NHS has been cut, people are out on the streets, people are starving, people are dying because of this Government.

But when it comes to this Council, I can set out for you what the budget cuts have looked like over the last 4 years. So in 2011/12 we recieved a budget cut of 11.3% which is £28.9m. You can imagine what impact that was. In the following year we faced a 7.8% budget reduction which meant £23.7 million was taken out of the kitty. In 13-14 we faced an 11.2% budget reduction which was another £26m away from our budget. In 14-15 we had 18.5% taken from us which equated to around £6.7m that year. Moving forward we have to find savings in the region of £28m. I will leave it to your imagination Mr Rahman what this means for local people and if we in Tower Hamlets will

survive the onslaught.

(No supplementary question was put)

6.6 Question from Ms Eileen Short:

On January 31st tenant organisations, trade unions and housing campaigners from all over London will come together on the March for Homes. As the general election approaches, we want to make sure politicians don't forget the millions of people - many of them in Tower Hamlets - who are in housing need. Everyone deserves a decent home. We demand investment in council housing, rent control and security of tenure. Can the Lead Member for Housing please state if the Council will support the March for Homes and welcome it to the borough if it passes through Tower Hamlets?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Development

Thank you Eileen for this question. The housing crisis is an issue in this country and it is at the core of the general election at the moment. It's a pity some of the parties didn't speak about this about 3 years ago but then hence we are facing a general election. The importance of decent affordable housing for Londoners is one of the key things of our Fairness Commissioner's report. Much of what the March for London wants to achieve are recommendations within our Fairness Commission, including improving the standard of the private rented accommodation creating rent models based on the principle that social rent should relate to the income of tenants, not market rents.

Campaigns against Government funding restrictions which prevent the building of affordable housing including the HRA debt cap. There is only 7% of the population which currently opposes capping of rent. I've often brought this up in the Council chambers and have been working towards whether or not we could develop a rent that enables people to live in their homes and enjoy their homes.

The statistics exist for a reason. Because the Tories and the New Labour have sat back for a number of years and watched social housing disintegrate while prices spiral out of control. London is already unaffordable for most because of the housing benefit cap, bedroom tax and similar callous policies which are displacing people from their homes and communities.

The Mayor and I fully support the March and we are aware it will be beginning at Shoreditch Church, its route taking it through the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. And I will be therefore marching with you and I will welcome the March for Homes to Tower Hamlets on January 31 and I would like to convey my heartfelt congratulations and support to all those who have worked on it.

Summary of supplementary question from Ms Short

You said earlier that we can't change the national situation, would you agree with us that we can have a good go at it if we stand together?

Summary of Councillor Rabina Khan's response to the supplementary question

Thank you Eileen. Yes if we stand together we will most certainly and on that basis if I may bring up the procedural motion under Rule 14.1.3 to debate our motion on the March for Homes.

Question 6.3 was not put due to the absence of the questioner. Questions 6.7 to 6.9 were not put due to lack of time. The Service Head, Democratic Services stated that written responses would be provided to these questions. (Note: The written responses are set out in Appendix 'A' to these minutes).

Procedural Motion

Councillor Rabina Khan **moved** and Councillor Abjol Miah **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied such that Motion 12.1 'Motion regarding March for Homes be taken as the next item of business.'" The motion was put to the vote and was **defeated**.

7. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor made his report wishing all present a belated Happy New Year. He updated the Council on key events and achievements within the Borough, and congratulated the Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioner Group (CGG) on being awarded best CCG of the year. .

The Mayor also echoed the Speaker's sentiments about the tragedy in Paris and reported that he had attended a multi faith meeting last night with community, religious leaders and the Borough Commander in respect of community safety

When the Mayor had completed his report, at the invitation of the Speaker the Leaders of the other political groups each then responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

Procedural Motion

After Councillor Rachael Saunders' response to the Mayor's report and before Councillor Peter Golds' response, Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs **moved**, and Councillor John Pierce **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.5, Rule 13.1 be suspended to enable an urgent motion

regarding Waste Management Strategy to be considered". The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

8. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

The following questions and in each case (except where indicated) a supplementary question were put and were responded to by the relevant Executive Member or Committee Chair:-

8.1 Question from Councillor Asma Begum

As Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, how many of the meetings did the Mayor attend in 2014? Does this reflect his commitment to the important issue of Health in the borough?

Response from Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Thank you Councillor Begum. I'd say that he has attended all of them really because he attends them through us. He has four Councillors on the Committee; they include Councillor Gulam Robbani, myself and Councillor Asad who chairs the meeting as well as our Executive Advisor, Councillor Mahbub Alam. The Mayor is clearly committed to the health agenda and he will do everything he can to make sure that we improve people's health and wellbeing in the borough.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Asma Begum

It's a shame that the Mayor has not prioritised the health of the Borough; it's his Vice-Chair that's chairing it, not the Mayor. And will the Mayor commit to attending any other meetings of the Health and Wellbeing Board?

Summary of response from Councillor Alibor Choudhury

I remember sitting and observing the contribution of my opposition Councillor, Councillor Denise Jones who is happy to turn up to some of these meetings, sometimes for 10 minutes, sometimes for a bit more than that. But she hardly says anything. So I think it is quite hypocritical for you to have a pop at the Mayor and a pop at us when we make a valuable and meaningful contribution.

8.2 Question from Councillor Abjol Miah

Could the Mayor highlight any steps, policies or initiatives that he has taken to put money in people's pockets in this Borough despite huge Tory cuts?

Response from Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Thank you Councillor Miah, I'll go straight into the initiatives shall I? The Mayor has helped in many ways. He has provided Council Tax discounts for pensioners and those that are on low incomes so they equated to £245,000 in 2012/13 and a further £575,000 in 2014/15. He froze Council Tax for the last five years. He absorbed the 10% cut to our Council Tax benefit reduction scheme which cost us £2.7m. He provided free school meals and then he rolled them out to benefit more primary school children.

He provided the Mayor's educational allowance which is something that the government took away. He provided university bursaries which were to the tune of £1,500 for each student and this benefitted 400 university students.

His DHP (Discretionary Housing Payments) continued to be supported and that cost us £1m and helped a variety of people in poor or dire housing situations. And he has set aside a further £1.3m over the next 2 years to help women back into work.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Abjol Miah

Can the Mayor highlight, provide steps or policies that the opposition Tory-Labour coalition have actually done in order to take money out of Tower Hamlets' residents' pockets.

Summary of response from Councillor Alibor Choudhury

Thank you Mr Miah I don't want to repeat everything that I said about what the Tory Government and their partners, the Labour Party in Tower Hamlets have done to us over the last 5 years in terms of budget reductions. But I can say that because of the opposition, mainly the Labour opposition and their co-defendants the Tories, in Tower Hamlets, we have seen £1m taken out of our budget to pay for the PWC investigation. We have had hundreds of thousands of pounds in litigation costs to pay and again this would have benefitted many of our residents and kept a lot of people in work and again and again. I've got to say this Councillor Saunders, it is because of your behaviour that we end up seeking Judicial Reviews.

8.3 Question from Councillor Craig Aston

Will the Mayor inform the Council as to how much money the Council wasted on failed judicial reviews and other failed legal cases in 2014?

Response from Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

I think Councillor Aston, wasted is a harsh word. I think it's prudently spent to be honest with you and I'll list you everything that we spent money on in relation to judicial reviews.

So the first one is the permitted developments rights challenge that we did with Islington as the Lead Council. The second was the Mayor of London's affordable housing policies. Again we went in a consortium led by Islington Council. The third was the fire station closures. Again these are all Tory policies that we had to fight because of you. People would have been in trouble and we had to act. The fourth one was the Best Value inspection which cost £38,000. There's the disrepair case and the possession action all a lot less than £10,000. So that's your list for you.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Craig Aston

I think the one the Lead Member missed out was £70,000 on the Judicial Review against DCLG's intervention, a case that the Judge dismissed as hopeless and the Lead Member says that's prudently spent. Well I beg to differ.

Mr Speaker, the Deputy Mayor isn't with us but he always reminds us quite rightly that as Councillors, we should defend and protect officers and that's quite right.

Councillor Choudhury will also be aware that no group of officers perhaps work harder in this borough than our Legal staff; so hard that our Monitoring Officer was nominated recently for the King's Bench Walk Chambers Monitoring Officer of the Year Award.

I think the Lead Member will join us in congratulating the Monitoring Officer on that. So will the Lead Member then take the opportunity to apologise to the Monitoring Officer and the legal staff for wasting their precious and valuable time on forcing them on them on these spurious trumped up legal cases that have no chance of succeeding from the start.

Summary of response from Councillor Alibor Choudhury

The Executive Member has no intention of apologising and we still maintain our line that we have not wasted any money.

Will you apologise for Eric Pickles spending £76,000 on biscuits?

Will you apologise for him spending £500,000 on limousines?

Will you apologise for his China flight where he spent £4,000 in a couple of nights? And will you also apologise for Eric spending £90,000 fighting the Trade Unions?

Is that a good use of money? I don't think it is Councillor Aston.

8.4 Question from Councillor John Pierce

Can the Mayor tell me how many times he has visited the Rich Mix Arts Centre in the previous year?

Response from Councillor Shafiqul Haque, Cabinet Member for Culture

The Mayor has not visited Rich Mix in the past year.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor John Pierce

Given the lack of visits to the Rich Mix, can the Mayor explain why he has personally requested legal action to be taken by officers, including the spending of £29,000 of council tax payers' money on external barristers, even though the Rich Mix has in September 2014 made a public offer to pay the sum in full of £850,000 and can he explain why he is the only elected member to have been consulted about this offer according to the Service Head for Legal Services, given that a significant part of the legal dispute to be implemented is regarding the Strategic Development Committee decision which, as has been noted by PWC, falls without the powers of the Executive Mayor?"

[Note: At this point the Interim Monitoring Officer indicated that he wished to address the meeting. At the Speaker's invitation, Mr Sullivan-Gould advised the Council as follows.]

Advice from Mr Meic Sullivan-Gould, Interim Monitoring Officer

Mr Speaker, Members of the Council need to be aware that there are current proceedings going on, with a case management conference next week, to deal with the claim by the Council for repayment of a loan and also a counter claim by the Rich Mix for payment of an extra grant, so from that point of view I caution members discussing the merits of that because that would be prejudicial.

In response to a question from Councillor Rachael Saunders, Mr Sullivan-Gould confirmed that the case was currently sub-judice.

8.5 Question from Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim

Since the beginning of the year the national Labour Party has been ensuring that the electorate are given a proper choice at the general election. Will the Mayor join me in calling the local Labour Party to stop acting in coalition with the local Tory Party against the Mayor - and his left wing policies - that any Labour Council will be proud of?

Response from Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

It is indeed strange that while the Labour Party are at war with the Tory party nationally, locally they seem to be hand in glove with them. Unfortunately in Tower Hamlets we have a Labour Party that operates hand in glove with the Tory group who fully support the Government's assault on Local Government. They fully support a Government that is destroying our National Health Service. They fully support a Government busy blaming the poorest and most

vulnerable in our society for an economic mess caused by the richest and most powerful.

So I join with you in calling on Tower Hamlets Labour Party to try and rediscover its founding principles which it's long forgotten and I'm sure it won't be able to connect to them again, not now anyway. I also join with this Administration in supporting progressive policies in this Borough. I also call on the Labour Party to stop its colluding with the Tory group in supporting its reactionary politics in this Borough.

(No supplementary question was asked)

8.6 Question from Councillor Julia Dockerill

On 8 December a motorcyclist tragically died after a collision with a lorry at the junction of Dock Street and the Highway. This junction has become of increasing concern to residents in Wapping, many of whom cross it to take their children to school in Aldgate. Will the Mayor inform the council as to what, if any, discussions he has had with Transport for London regarding safety improvements here, particularly in view of the proposed construction of a new school next to this junction associated with the London Docks Development?

Response from Councillor Shahed Ali, Cabinet Member for Clean & Green

Thank you for your question Councillor Dockerill. First of all can I say that it's obviously incredibly upsetting for any member in this chamber and indeed the general public in general to have witnessed yet another collision and fatality on our roads. It is a TfL road, but obviously that's no excuse to the responsibility we have as a Council and my sincere condolences to family and friends of the victim.

The junction has been a source of concern for many years going back to the days when I actually used to work in Wapping, but I won't go into that story now. We have always constantly consistently lobbied for improvements to various areas in The Highway. And you'll be pleased to know that very recently this meant that they have introduced a pedestrian countdown feature on the traffic lights at that particular junction, and the phasing of the traffic signalling was also remodelled. The Police investigation into this particular incident is still ongoing and therefore it would be premature for me to comment on that aspect of the cause of the actual incident itself at this moment in time.

But obviously and naturally there are concerns of parents that live either side of the highway I would say no doubt that includes myself. I have children that go to school on the road that is parallel to The Highway, Cable Street. Although your question doesn't focus on cyclists, it does obviously relate to collisions on the road if you like. So I think we also have a duty to educate our cyclists out there as well who tend to feel that cycle lanes also do not

have to adhere to the normal traffic rules and regulations that motorists are expected to adhere to.

You'll also be pleased to know that we have managed to secure an additional £200,000 from the London Dock Development towards further improvements to the pedestrian crossings onto The Highway and that will be located just west of the junction of The Highway and Wellclose Street. And also no doubt that will go towards further pedestrian improvements to that vicinity including Dock Street and Vargen Way.

I'm obviously very familiar with the ward as my colleagues Councillors Aminur Khan and Asad are. We represent the area obviously north of The Highway and therefore we have residents constantly bringing and raising these concerns so I'm glad that you've raised them yourself tonight as well.

And finally I hope that you will continue to highlight to us any concerns that you have from your constituents on the other side of The Highway and we will best work together to make sure that we address any safety concerns because I think regardless of whichever political spectrum we come from, safety is an uppermost concern for every single member in this chamber.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Julia Dockerill

I'm just glad to hear about that funding, I was not aware of it and I don't know whether that includes the possibility of a bridge given that we've got a school that's going to be coming on line. Could you clarify whether a bridge would be given consideration as part of that £200,000.

Summary of response from Councillor Shahed Ali

Very briefly, at this moment in time that isn't a consideration that has come to light. However there is other work that's going on conducted by TfL. You'll have heard recently that one of the Mayor's pledges was to introduce 20mph zones throughout the Borough. As part of that exercise there is a lot more extensive work going on to do with The Highway itself. So again it would be premature for me to comment on specifics at this time no doubt although the Highway is a major concern and we are doing everything we can in our powers to make sure we can make it as safe as possible within the constraints we have.

8.7 Question from Councillor Ayas Miah

In St Dunstan's ward, particularly in the new development area, residents are having difficulties getting a new parking permit or renewing their existing permit because of the car free zone. According to PTS (2011) parking transfer scheme - if some families move to 3 bedroom or larger social rented car free homes they will get at least one permit but the reality is that they do not get a permit even if they have a 3 or more bedroom house. Can the Mayor explain this please?

Response from Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Development

Thank you Mr Speaker. First of all I'd like to remind you that the Car Free Development Policy is not a Tower Hamlets policy. It is a London policy which we have to comply with. The Mayor has gone further than any other Council to try to support residents who require a car parking space to meet the mobility needs of their family. The Permit Transfer Scheme which is known as the PTS was introduced to allow overcrowded families in the Borough moving to a car free social rented 3 plus bedroom home to transfer one existing on street resident car parking permit, if they held their on-street permit for at least one year prior to moving. This was to help more residents in the borough to move into more suitable homes and to alleviate the overcrowding register as well. Additionally disabled drivers living in car free homes are eligible for on street resident parking permits.

Residents who already live in a car free development, cannot apply for a transfer permit. But they should be advised before moving into that development that it was a car free development. Should you Councillor Ayas have any further queries, I'm quite willing to sit and talk to you and discuss them, but I would say that the PTS is under review to see what we have learnt in the past and how we can improve it in the future.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Ayas Miah

Even if there is a gap of one week or over to renew their existing permit, while someone moves in on the Ocean Estate from outside, the Council normally disallows them to renew their permit if they move from outside even if they have an existing permit for a number of years they are using. So I think there is a contradiction.

Summary of response from Councillor Rabina Khan

Councillor Ayas, I have stated before that this is under review and I would welcome any particular cases that you need to speak to me about. But let me remind you of something. That it was under Councillor Julia Mainwaring the then Leader of the Labour Party and Council to introduce the policy and was adopted in 1998. The Policy Number is ST28 and the UDP Policy which was the first introduction of the Car Free Zone policy. It was further approved in the Council's Local Plan Core Strategy Document in 2010 whilst Councillor Abbas was the Leader of the Council under a Labour Administration. So you see Councillor Ayas, Mayor Rahman has had to pick up the pieces in order to benefit the residents of this Borough.

8.8 Question from Councillor Mohammed Maium Miah

Recently, Sir Michael Wilshaw raised concerns about the educational attainment of White British Free School Meals Pupils. Does the Mayor have any plan to tackle this issue in Tower Hamlets?

Response from Councillor Gulam Robbani, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

Good evening Mr Speaker and thank you Councillor Miah for bringing this important issue to the forefront. As you know education is very dear to us and we do everything in our ability to make sure all our children get the best education in the Borough. Tower Hamlets even though we are one of the high performing Authorities in terms of achieving locally and nationally in terms of comparing with the London average and the national average. We are performing much higher than the London average and the national average. However there is a group of pupils we understand they are not achieving as we would like them to.

Therefore as soon as I was given the job of Lead Member for education, I had a meeting with the Corporate Director and Head of E-School and Learning Achievement and gave them an instruction to make sure that we have a strategy to address some of those students who are not achieving as the rest of the Borough are achieving.

To this end, we want to have a conference very soon inviting national speakers and national people who have expertise as well as going to our local expertise to make sure all our schools perform to the highest standard. We will be looking in detail in terms of how we could improve the school standard for all our pupils. And therefore I would give an assurance to my Council and all the Councillors in this chamber that we will do everything in our capacity to make sure all our students perform and all our students achieve the highest and best to their ability.

(No supplementary question was asked)

8.9 Question from Councillor Chris Chapman

Will the Mayor comment on the two separate and independent reports from Thames Water and the external consultants LUC which confirm that the that the Isle of Dogs will suffer from low water pressure and possibly run out of drinking water in the summer as well as suffer from 'more frequent and severe back surging of the sewage' network because of overdevelopment overwhelming the existing capacity of the water network on the island?

Response from Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Development

Thank you Mr Speaker. Happy New Year Councillor Chapman. The Council will continue to meet with Thames Water as a key stakeholder and statutory consultee to discuss detailed applications and policy guidance in order to ensure comprehensive understanding of the water infrastructure issues affecting the island. It is important to note that water provision is considered a key piece of infrastructure and utility service which affects the plans beyond the South Quay area as it is a matter for the Isle of Dogs Opportunity Area Framework will aim to address this in further detail.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Chris Chapman

Yes thank you and Happy New Year to you. There was a lot there but not an answer. What I would say is may I ask the Executive Member if this is such a priority why there is no mention of it in the South Quay Masterplan Document which my colleague Andrew Wood has done considerable work on and has scrutinised. He can find no reference to this provision or this issue. Does it in fact demonstrate that this is very much business as usual in terms of the way this Administration has treated the residents of the Isle of Dogs which is pretty much with total disregard and disdain.

Is it not the fact that this Administration is continuing to treat these very hard working residents who've had to suffer multiple longstanding infrastructure issues? Are they not just attempting overdevelopment on the Island on a quite severe level and use residents as a cash cow?

Summary of response from Councillor Rabina Khan

Forgive me Councillor Chapman. Maybe I didn't quite explain myself so let me rephrase it again to you. Thames Water is a statutory consultee and therefore plays a key role in offering advice and steer on planning and other strategic matters at a local and regional level. Therefore those matters fall under the GLA and under the Mayor of London's responsibilities.

Let me give you an example of how this works Councillor Chapman. The Coalition Government and Mr Pickles approved the proposed Thames Tideway Sewer for a super sewer at the cost of King Edward Memorial Park and the unfairness of this on residents, despite local campaigners and the Administration working together to identify an alternative site, so your own Government supports Thames Water over residents.

8.10 Question from Councillor Helal Uddin

Does the Mayor have any plan to improve community cohesion in the borough further?

Response from Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

Thank you Helal for your good question. Thank you. Just to say it's a very straightforward answer. I hope you'll agree that this Borough has a very strong track record on community cohesion. Over 80% of residents in this Borough according to the Annual Residents Survey, not my ward or your ward, our residents are saying 80% of people are saying that people from different backgrounds get on well together in our Borough and this is what our Residents Survey said. This is a 10% increase from 5 years ago when someone I don't want to even name who is not here anymore, he was the Leader. But 10% increase from that time and we are working hard. We just want to increase more and more.

And I just want to ensure that our people get on well together. We work together for the betterment of our residents despite as I said before what the outside world said, despite what Eric Pickles said. Our people when there is a problem in our Borough we stand together. When the English Defence League made a threat everyone came together on the street to defend our Borough. When Eric Pickles with all due respect decided to send Commissioners a lot of people came out and demonstrated against the decision and it was not Bengali people it was more or less everybody. That shows that when there is a crisis, when there is a problem when there is a cut we are together and will be together in the future.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Helal Uddin

Yes Mr Speaker of course considering the current climate in this Borough there is a lot of exclusion and I find that the difficulty is to have that community cohesion in this Borough. I just wanted to know whether the Lead Member has any sort of idea what sort of mechanisms are in place to address and tackle social exclusion in the Borough. It would be very helpful to know what sort of mechanism he is planning, that people are working together to make it happen, if he could say some kind of example in place? Thank you.

Summary of response from Councillor Ohid Ahmed

As I said before I don't want to repeat but we have three central themes

- Tackling inequality;
- Strengthening Community cohesion; and
- Building community leadership

And I think that if we can work on these areas we can build more community cohesion and we are working on it.

8.11 Question from Councillor Gulam Kibriya Choudhury

Can the Mayor highlight how he plans to fight the unprecedented and ideologically driven Tory cuts?

Response from Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Thank you Councillor Choudhury. The Mayor and Tower Hamlets First have made our opposition clear to the Government's plans for austerity and to this end the Mayor has been very prudent with Council resources, he will protect public services where they matter to people. He will invest in community development. He will stimulate the local economy which the Government failed to do by promoting trade with local businesses and suppliers. He will foster growth and support the business sector and he will build more homes to increase our Council Tax base.

(No supplementary question was asked)

8.12 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood

Will the Mayor inform the Council what work has been undertaken following the 2014 disclosure of a decline in the percentage of primary school pupils attending local authority schools rated by OFSTED as Outstanding in Tower Hamlets, which according to the most recent OFSTED inspection has shown has continued.

Response from Councillor Gulam Robbani, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

Can I just thank Councillor Wood for asking this question. Can I just remind him that with the latest Tower Hamlets annual OFSTED report shows that the percentage of students attending a Good or Outstanding primary school in the Borough has risen since last year. We are one of the best performing local authorities in this measure. Those students who go to a Good or Outstanding school is 91% compared to the London average of only 85%. And the National average Councillor is 91%. Therefore we are massively ahead of the local and national level. Therefore stop painting a negative picture of our students. We are excelling in education and therefore you should be joining us in supporting all our schools including the primary and secondary schools.

Summary of supplementary question from Councillor Andrew Wood

I'm going to pass the Lead Member the actual statistics just to make it clear in Bethnal Green & Bow Primary Schools, only 9% of pupils go to a school rated as Outstanding. It was 29% 5 years ago. Lewisham's percentage is 27%. Camden 33%. Newham is 24%. And just to make clear this is not ideologically driven, in Tower Hamlets Secondary Schools 53% of pupils go to schools rated as Outstanding so the secondary schools in Tower Hamlets are performing extremely well. Ok but what's happening in Bethnal Green and Bow? Why is it that there has been a decline down from 29% to 9%? It's the only Council in London where I can find this decline. Ok. I've raised this for the second time OK. What are you doing about it?

Summary of response from Councillor Gulam Robbani

Councillor I think I remember last time you were comparing us with Richmond. I'm clearly not doing that tonight. In terms of Government the way they measure us, they don't just measure Outstanding. They measure with Good and Outstanding so he can forget the brief to add the Good. So if you look at the Good and Outstanding he will see our performance is 91%. In terms of secondary education yes he's right. We are performing at 91% and yes in terms of what we are doing we are working very closely with the schools and we are working with the teachers and the parents and the governors. And this Council has a very strong track record of working with teachers, governors, the schools and everyone. And therefore don't throw all these rubbish statistics at us.

Questions 8.13 to 8.22 were not put due to lack of time. The Service Head, Democratic Services stated that written responses would be provided to the questions. (Note: The written responses are included in Appendix 'A' to these minutes.)

Procedural Motion

Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.5, Rule 13.1 be suspended to enable an urgent motion regarding Wasted Public Money to be considered". The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

9. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

9.1 Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on matters referred by the Council

Councillor Joshua Peck, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, moved the report. In doing so however, he stated that he had not seen the report prior to publication and did not believe that it was fully accurate in conveying the findings of the Committee on the matter.

RESOLVED

That the report, and the observations of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee thereon, be noted.

Procedural Motion

Councillor Rachael Saunders, **moved**, and Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed **seconded**, a procedural motion "that under Procedure Rule 14.1.5, Rule 13.1 be suspended to enable an urgent motion regarding 'Circle Housing Group & Old Ford Housing Association' to be considered". The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

Order of Business.

Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed **seconded**, a procedural motion that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied as follows:

- Item 12.2 - Motion Regarding Dockland Sailing Centre
- Item 13.3 - Urgent Motion regarding Circle Housing Group & Old Ford Housing Association
- Item 12.8 - Motion regarding public access to information
- Item 12.11 - Motion regarding New Schools
- Item 12.12 - Motion regarding homelessness in Tower Hamlets

Item 12.13 - Motion regarding tax dodging

This motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

Extension of time limit for the meeting

Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Danny Hassell **seconded**, a procedural motion that “under Procedure Rule 15.11.7 the meeting be extended for up to an additional 15 minutes to enable the consideration of the Urgent Motion regarding Circle Housing Group & Old Ford Housing Association.”

The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

10. TO RECEIVE REPORTS AND QUESTIONS ON JOINT ARRANGEMENTS/EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS (IF ANY)

There was no business to transact under this agenda item.

11. OTHER BUSINESS (IF ANY)

There was no other business.

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

12.2 Motion regarding Docklands Sailing Centre

Prior to the debate on this motion, the Interim Monitoring Officer advised the Council. He stated that members of the Strategic Development Committee would be aware that they had a duty to consider any planning application that came before the Committee on its merits and on the basis of all the information presented to the Committee. Those Members should therefore not make any contribution to the current debate that could indicate that they were predetermined in relation to any potential planning application. The Interim Monitoring Officer also advised the meeting that the Council could not bind the Strategic Development Committee in its consideration of a planning matter and therefore in the event that the second proposed resolution was agreed, this would not have effect.

Councillor Dave Chesterton **moved**, and Councillor Andrew Wood **seconded**, the motion as set out in the agenda.

Following debate the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council Notes:

1. The developers of the Westferry Printers site are currently going through pre-application public consultations.
2. The Sailing Centre is concerned about the potential effect development alongside the Millwall Dock may have on the wind and the detrimental impact this may have on sailing and other watersports.
3. The Sailing Centre has made a number of representations to the developers; so far the Sailing Centre's concerns have been largely ignored.
4. The Sailing Centre is the borough's premier watersports centre and among the largest public open space in Tower Hamlets. Pressures on public infrastructure as a result of population increases arising from new developments are well understood. The Council must protect its public open spaces for use by current and future generations.

This Council Believes:

1. Pressures on public infrastructure as a result of population increases arising from new developments are well understood.
2. The Council must protect its public open spaces for use by current and future generations.
3. Council should continue to recognise the importance of the Docklands Sailing Centre in enabling use of one of the largest areas of open space in Tower Hamlets by the whole community for sport and recreation, with unique opportunities for education and employment.

This Council resolves:

1. To protect the Docklands Sailing Centre from the consequences of property development which may prevent the continued use of the Millwall Docks for those uses and the charitable purposes of the Docklands Sailing Centre Trust.
2. To exercise its powers as local planning authority, to ensure any development on the West Ferry Printers site does not cause any detriment to sailing and use of the Millwall Docks from Docklands Sailing Centre.

[Note: Members of the Strategic Development Committee wished it recorded that they abstained from voting on the above motion.]

12.3 Motion regarding solidarity with French citizens

Councillor Chris Chapman **moved**, and Councillor Julia Dockerill **seconded**, the motion as set out in the agenda.

Councillor Shiria Khatun **moved**, and Councillor Rachael Saunders **seconded**, an amendment to insert 'and citizens at the Jewish supermarket' under the third paragraph.

Following debate the amendment was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

The motion as amended was then put to the vote and was **agreed** unanimously.

RESOLVED

This Council Notes:

- In this year of Magna Carta, original copies of which were circulated throughout the Country in Anglo Norman French, The Council of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets reaffirms the principles of freedom of speech, which have been hard won over successive centuries and condemns the atrocities in France this month.
- That London is the sixth largest French City in the world and that we support the loss shared by our French neighbours in this Borough, City and those just twenty one miles across the Channel.
- The wickedness of those who brutally murdered journalists, police officers and citizens at the Jewish supermarket will not divide the people of Europe, who have fought for the basic freedoms of speech and assembly, regardless of our different nationalities.

This Council resolves that the Speaker of Tower Hamlets writes to Her Excellency Madame Sylvie Bermann, Ambassador of the Republic of France to show our solidarity with our French fellow citizens over this tragedy.

Motions 12.1, 12.4–12.13 were not debated due to lack of time.

13. URGENT MOTIONS

The Council agreed to suspend Procedure Rule 13.1 to enable the following urgent motions to be debated without notice:

13.1 Motion regarding Waste Management Strategy

Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs **moved**, and Councillor John Pierce **seconded**, a tabled motion on the above matter.

Following debate the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council notes:

- that the Cabinet Paper making significant proposals about the future of waste management in Tower Hamlets was withdrawn on 7th January without any public discussion
- that the proposals have concerning implications for the cost, scrutiny and efficiency of rubbish and recycling collection in the borough, including multiple contracts with variable prices and no local depot which could lead to delays in collection and fewer local jobs
- that the proposals fail to investigate all options, such as whether costs could be reduced and scrutiny of services improved by bringing waste management services in-house

This Council further notes:

- that there are already problems with waste management in the borough, with local residents regularly raising concerns about dirty streets, missed rubbish collections and flytipping hotspots
- that this has been exacerbated by the Mayor bringing in charges for bulk rubbish collection back in June 2012
- that residents rightly expect the council to deliver on basic services and ensure our streets are kept clean
- that despite improvements in recycling rates, many residents still struggle to recycle as much as they could, due to inadequate purple bin capacity and lack of facilities to recycle food waste in many blocks
- that the Budget includes worrying cuts to monitoring of street cleaning

This Council believes:

- that there is an urgent need to get a grip on clean streets and recycling rates
- that the waste management strategy must be used as an opportunity to tackle these problems while ensuring value for money for local taxpayers
- that all options for waste management must be thoroughly considered and openly discussed in public

This Council resolves:

- to call on Mayor Lutfur Rahman to protect local waste services including a local depot
- to call on the executive to thoroughly investigate the option of bringing waste services in house
- to instruct officers to explicitly identify how the new waste management proposals will improve street cleaning, flytipping collection and

recycling rates, including more options for recycling for those living in blocks

13.2 Motion regarding Wasted Public Money

Councillor Rachael Saunders **moved**, and Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed **seconded**, a tabled motion on the above matter.

Following debate the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council notes:

- The £38,735 of taxpayers' money spent by the Mayor on judicial review of the government's decision to send in PwC inspectors.
- The £81,924.70 of taxpayers' money spent by the Mayor to employ the law firm Taylor Wessing in response to the Panorama program.
- The £41,144 of taxpayers' money spent by the Mayor to employ the communication consultancy company Champollion in response to the Panorama program.

This Council further notes:

- The Mayor's intention to begin judicial review of directions from the Department of Communities and Local Government.

This Council believes:

- that public money has been wasted.
- that any further legal action should be funded by the Mayor personally, rather than from public funds.

This Council resolves:

- to call on Mayor Lutfur Rahman to stop wasting public money.
- to call on the Mayor to personally fund any further legal action.

13.3 Motion regarding Circle Housing Group & Old Ford Housing Association

Councillor Amina Ali **moved**, and Councillor Joshua Peck **seconded**, a tabled motion on the above matter.

Following debate the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

This Council notes that:

- Old Ford Housing Association was established in 1998 as the successor body to the Tower Hamlets Housing Action Trust, which had been responsible for the redevelopment of the Tredegar, Monteith and Lefevre estates in Bow;
- OFHA was a subsidiary of Circle 33 Housing Trust for financing purposes, but was accountable to its own Board of tenants, leaseholders and independent members;
- OFHA completed this redevelopment programme to a good standard and generally enjoyed high levels of satisfaction from residents;
- In 2005, Circle 33 merged with Anglia Housing to form Circle Anglia. Other housing associations have been merged into the group since then to form Circle Housing Group;
- In 2007, LBTH transferred the “Parkside” estates – Lanfranc, Locton, Ranwell and McCullum – to OFHA under the Housing Choice programme to bring them up to the Decent Homes Standard within five years;
- OFHA fitted all tenants’ homes with new kitchens and bathrooms by 2012, but other promises within the “Offer Document” have not been kept, including external works to at least a dozen blocks, environmental works on other parts of the estates and the Overcrowding Reduction Initiative;
- In 2013, Circle Housing Group required Old Ford to terminate its Repairs & Maintenance contract with Mears and Major Works contract with Apollo to sign up to a new group-wide contract with Kier. The performance of this contractor has been exceptionally poor in the 15 months since then, with appointments repeatedly missed, phone calls going unanswered and repairs not being carried out to a satisfactory standard, leading to hundreds of complaints;
- Circle Housing Group is now taking forward a restructuring programme, which involves the closure of Old Ford’s offices in Bow and Stratford. When questioned on this by staff, a member of Circle Housing Group’s Senior Management Team is reported to have said that Old Ford could use a stall in Roman Road market;
- Despite repeated promises by Circle Housing Group that an action plan was in place, the Repairs & Maintenance service remains inadequate and most of the major works committed to by Circle are now more than two years overdue;
- The Homes & Communities Agency regulator is now investigating these failings.

This Council believes that:

- By terminating the contract with Mears, Circle Housing Group has undermined Old Ford’s ability to provide an adequate Repairs & Maintenance service, resulting in “Serious Detriment” to its residents;

- By terminating the contract with Apollo, Circle Housing Group has significantly delayed Old Ford's major works programme of external works to the Parkside estates, leaving it in breach of the promises made to tenants and leaseholders in the 2005 "Offer Document" and listed as "Qualifying Works" in Schedule 17 of the Transfer Agreement;
- The proposed closure of Old Ford's offices is also a breach of the specific promises made to tenants and leaseholders on the Parkside estates in the 2005 "Offer Document".

This Council resolves:

- To write to the Homes & Communities Agency, calling for the regulator to investigate whether residents have suffered serious detriment as a result of the failings of the Repairs & Maintenance contract;
- To support Old Ford residents in preparing their own submission to the Homes and Communities Agency
- To call on the Mayor to suspend Circle Housing Group as a Preferred Development Partner in Tower Hamlets with immediate effect;
- To call on the Mayor to instruct officers to explore options for legal proceedings against Circle Housing Group for breach of Schedule 17 of the Transfer Agreement and to report back to Full Council on the possibility of such proceedings by 15th April.

The meeting ended at 10.44 p.m.

Speaker of the Council

APPENDIX 'A' – WRITTEN RESPONSES TO PUBLIC AND MEMBERS'
QUESTIONS THAT WERE NOT PUT AT THE MEETING

6.3 Question from Ms Ghulshana Begum

In November 2014, women in Tower Hamlets and up and down the country, proudly celebrated White Ribbon Day to eliminate violence against women and to hope for a world where women and girls can live free from the fear of violence. Could the Executive Member please provide an update about what Tower Hamlets Council is doing to promote this important initiative in the Borough?

Written response by Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

The White Ribbon Campaign in Tower Hamlets was officially launched at the Whitechapel Idea Store on 25 November 2014. The launch marked the start of a 2 week borough wide awareness raising campaign to highlight violence against women and girls.

Awareness raising events were held at all the Ideas Stores, Queen Mary's University, local schools, supermarkets and across council sites. The campaign saw over 500 White Ribbon pledges signed and over 300 residents attending community events.

Idea Stores across the borough trained all their front line staff in domestic abuse awareness so they can help offer residents support if they need it. Staff members from other organisations are now being trained, to become Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) champions.

Residents were encouraged to report domestic violence to the Police and for those seeking advice and guidance on domestic violence, to contact the council's helpline on 0800 279 5434 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm).

This is part of the Council's wider work to address historic under-reporting of domestic abuse – a national problem caused by lack of confidence in the reporting system.

A key component of the Council's approach to tackling this issue is to recruit Violence Against Women and Girls champions to help enable more people in raising awareness and offering victims support.

6.7 Question from Mr Lukman Miah:

Could you tell us what powers actually the so-called Pickles' Commissioners have and how does it affect service delivery by the Council. Can they stop the Mayor or Executive Members from their duty of serving the residents?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

Pickles' bark was considerably worse than his bite, and that's because he has very little evidence of anything. He can shout about a 'culture of cronyism' under the protection of parliamentary privilege and claim to be taking us over, but in reality he's unable to take full control of a high-performing council like ours.

The commissioners are able to oversee certain parts of processes around grants making and property disposals and appoint some election officials. The overwhelming majority of the council's functions and £1.4bn budget are untouched.

If the commissioners do attempt to impose a political position on us, we will resist that vigorously. As it is, we hope we can work with them where we agree that improvements need to be made.

We remain resentful that the three commissioners will cost Tower Hamlets residents £1600 a day.

6.8 Question from Mr Khairul Alam:

Considering the fact that St Dunstan's has the most new houses built, what is the Council doing to fulfil the promise made in the increased parking manifesto?

Response by Councillor Shahed Ali, Cabinet Member for Clean & Green.

Since May 2014, 244 new parking bays have been installed to support the Mayor's manifesto commitment to increase the availability of parking within the Borough.

We have also identified 200 further potential spaces that, subject to statutory consultation, will be installed over the next 12 – 18 months.

Officers are also looking to create 300 prioritised resident bays in Fish Island, through installation of a permanent Controlled Parking Zone. This means that parking spaces will be prioritised for residents - helping residents who are finding it increasingly difficult to find parking nearby, especially when large events are on at the Olympic Park.

It is anticipated that the remainder of the 1000 bay target will be implemented incrementally, which is explained in the Parking Policy Review on the Council's Forward Plan.

6.9 Question from Ms Momina Begum:

As a result of budgetary pressure and Government cuts, the Council was considering closing some nurseries in the Borough. Some residents, especially mothers of those affected, were not happy with that option and rightly so.

Have you taken the time to listen to these concerns of the effected residents or not? And could you provide an update please?

Response by Councillor Gulam Robbani, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

Thank you for your question. I am very pleased to that our community nurseries will be staying open.

For over months the Council has conducted a community consultation on the future of our community nurseries and the Mayor had a personal meeting with some of the users.

After giving careful consideration to the views of users, parents, nursery workers, trade unions and other members of the community, we decided to keep all four nurseries open.

As the outcome of this community consultation exercise demonstrates, we are committed to working with the community to protect front line services.

I would like to thank everybody who took part in our community consultation exercise and reaffirm our commitment as Mayor that we will work with the community to best protect our borough from the impact of government cuts.

8.13 Question from Councillor Candida Ronald

Does the Mayor have any plans to tackle the growing problem of buy-to-leave properties in the borough?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Development

Thank you for your question. This is an issue the Mayor is aware off and extremely concerned about.

The Fairness Commission, commissioned by the Mayor, reflected this concern, especially the impact of large foreign direct investment in the London housing market, which is simply creating safety deposit boxes in the sky for foreign investors and not solving London's housing crisis.

The Mayor also committed, at the London Citizen's Mayoral Assembly, to investigate ways of penalising buy to leave owners.

We are currently undertaking the Strategic Housing Market Assessment which will provide us with an understanding of the number of homes which aren't in occupation in the borough. This will help to guide our response.

In addition we are watching with interest the outcome of Islington's current consultation on potential options for preventing such wasted housing supply in the future, through a draft Supplementary Planning Document which proposes use Section 106 agreements to ensure that new-build housing in major developments is not left empty.

Once the extent of the issue in the borough has been identified the Mayor will consider all the options for ensuring such valuable housing resources are used effectively to meet the needs of the borough's growing population.

8.14 Question from Councillor Mahbub Alam

Could the Lead Member please provide an update about residents' satisfaction levels overall and which areas do we need to focus more on, especially as result of recent politically motivated campaign by Eric Pickles against the people of Tower Hamlets who had the audacity to falsely accuse us of funding bias whilst saving the most affluent Tory-run authorities from the impact of cuts?

Response by Councillor Oliur Rahman, Deputy Mayor

The recent Annual Residents' Survey, a large scale public consultation, leaves our borough with much to be proud of.

79% of residents are satisfied with the borough as a place to live, and 78% see it as a place where people from diverse backgrounds get on well and live together in harmony. Concern about crime was at its lowest since the survey began sixteen years ago.

Tower Hamlets First are particularly pleased that many more residents not only feel that the council is doing a better job, but also that residents feel that that they have more of an influence over what the council does.

In 2012 we took the decision to freeze council tax and ensure more money stayed in the pockets of less well-off residents. Accordingly concern about council tax is at a ten-year low. Concerns about employment have already fallen, with Mayor Rahman having identified decent jobs as a priority. The council received its Living Wage accreditation this year and the Mayor has pledged to create 20,000 sustainable jobs this term.

Concerns of course remain over a range of issues including the council's accessibility by phone and some prevailing anti-social behaviour. Tower Hamlets First representatives will be working with Council officers to address these concerns and have drawn up a clear action plan.

As the Mayor said “I am pleased that even in the context of savage Tory cuts, we are still delivering great local services for our residents and community relations remain excellent. But we’re far from complacent – where residents have raised concerns we are taking them into account and doing all we can to resolve them.”

8.15 Question from Councillor Peter Golds

Will the Mayor inform the council and local residents as to why he is removing the ancient rights of English citizens enshrined in law since 1832 to protect the amount of light entering their home in order to deliver more profit to the private sector developer of the City Pride development?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Development

Thank you for your question Cllr Golds. I must say I am, as always, gobsmacked at the gall of your question.

You accuse us of wanting to deliver more profit to the private sector.

Let me remind you what your Tory led Government has done to local Government finance and housing provision since it came into power:

- Huge budget reductions, aimed at the poorest councils
- A massive reduction in grant available for public housing
- No movement on the HRA debt cap, so we can’t borrow to build
- welfare reforms which price residents out of the borough and make housing financing more unstable.

Our only way of providing the affordable housing our resident need is through sec106 arrangements with private developers.

We aren’t feathering their nests. We’re playing the very rigged game your party devised.

Moreover, your Tory London Mayor supports the growth on the isle of dogs, welcomes foreign investors in London and doesn’t even care about how much affordable housing or community benefits they bring.

Now let me be clear. This is not a decision the Mayor or Cabinet entered into lightly.

We have ensured that every element of the relevant sections of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 have been satisfied.

This means we can only undertake this if we think the proposed development is likely to improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of LBTH’s area.

In this case it is justified. Due to the provision of 243 much needed affordable and family homes.

It will also help fulfil a number of the Council's strategic and policy objectives regarding new housing provision and regeneration in its area.

Moreover, we are clear that those residents impacted will still be eligible for compensation

The balancing of public benefits and human/private rights sits at the heart of the decision making process of Section 237 schemes.

We are satisfied that in this particular case, that the public, well-being, benefits outweigh the infringement of private rights and that the level of infringement is no more than necessary than to enable the development to proceed.

8.16 Question from Councillor Danny Hassell

How many children are on the borough's missing children register and what actions are being taken to ensure the safety of these children?

Response by Councillor Gulam Robbani, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

The Council does not have a general register of missing children – the police are the authority who keeps the missing person's register.

However, preventative work is incredibly important in ensuring that young people do not go missing from care – by making sure they have access to various sources of support and forums to voice their concerns. For that reason, we currently have no children missing from care in the borough.

When a child does go missing from care, we take it incredibly seriously and there are a number of actions that take place to ensure the safety or location of that child. We immediately report these cases to the police, and effort is taken up on part of social workers and the police to identify and visit any possible locations where the child might be.

We also may meet with police and other organisations to agree the best possible set of actions in relation to that particular young person, and to decide, for example, whether an application for court orders needs to be taken out to try to ascertain the whereabouts of the young person.

When a child or young person is located and returns to their placement, they will be interviewed by social work staff / police in an attempt to assess the level of risk to which they may have been exposed and to consider what actions may be necessary to prevent any reoccurrence. If they are thought to be particularly vulnerable or at risk of sexual exploitation and / or there is a

concern that they may go missing again, arrangements may be made for a placement to be made in a secure unit when they are located.

8.17 Question from Councillor Suluk Ahmed

Leading up to Christmas and New year when many were busy buying presents and celebrating with their family and friends, it was appalling to see many vulnerable people sleeping rough. Can the Mayor shed some light on what the Council is doing to reduce rough sleeping in the Borough and is there scope to work with other stakeholders and partners in this area?

Response by Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Development

Thank you for your question. Whilst even one rough sleeper is one too many, I do not quite agree that there are “many people sleeping rough” in the borough but I understand and agree with your general point overall and I think that is what you meant.

The last independent formal street count, undertaken during a night in November found just 6 people sleeping rough.

Tower Hamlets has been singled out as providing the best service in London in its work to assist rough sleepers. Indeed, that has been acknowledged recently through a £250,000 grant from the Single Homelessness Fund (awarded by Eric Pickles’ CLG). And an additional £80,000 from the GLA. Indeed, the Tower Hamlets’ bid took all of the GLA allocation.

We do currently rely on our partners, and our residents to provide support to rough sleepers. This council piloted the “No Second Night Out” initiative whereby every person sleeping rough received a service offer on the first night out with our Street Outreach Team partner. We are about to embark on a major publicity campaign to encourage residents to notify of any rough sleepers to aid this work.

They can do so by contacting the National Rough Sleeping Reporting Line (“Streetlink”) at www.streetlink.org.uk or by telephoning 0300 500 0914

As a final comment, the Housing Options Service’s work received an important accolade in the recent prestigious Andy Ludlow Awards for its work with single homeless people.

8.18 Question from Councillor Rachael Saunders

Does the Mayor intend to improve the cleanliness of the borough’s streets in his new waste strategy?

Response by Councillor Shahed Ali, Cabinet Member for Clean & Green

Of course the Mayor is committed to improving the cleanliness of this borough.

He has done an excellent job so far – which is why we have won so many awards for how clean our streets are! And with almost 100% of our streets free of litter, it is no wonder that we have received such accolades!

But we will keep on improving, and so yes, of course, the Mayor is intending to keep on improving.

8.19 Question from Councillor Shah Alam

Given that nationally there has been reductions and severe pressure on library services as a result of coalition cuts, will the Lead Member join me in celebrating our local success of idea stores in Tower Hamlets and how this helps local residents?

Response by Councillor Shafiqul Haque, Cabinet Member for Culture

Thank you for your question. I am very pleased to use this opportunity to highlight the fantastic services being provided in our Ideas stores.

As you rightly highlight the provision of library services across London have been threatened by government cuts. I am proud to say that while other boroughs are closing libraries and restricting services, here in Tower Hamlets we are opening libraries and extending services.

The latest comparative public library statistics were published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in December 2014. These show the success of Idea Store in attracting visitors.

- Idea Stores had 2 c ,159,372 visitors in the year ending March 2014. This is the third highest in London.
- Making adjustments for population size our Idea Stores are the 5th most visited libraries in the whole country
- The Idea Store in Whitechapel is the 9th busiest library out of 180 authorities in England, Scotland and Wales.

This performance is exceptional given the socio economic profile of the Borough and the model continues to demonstrate that it is one of the most powerful engines for engagement not only in the UK but also internationally.

I am sure I can speak for everyone here in congratulating our Ideas Stores staff for the fantastic job they are doing.

8.20 Question from Councillor Dave Chesterton

The Mayor will recognise that, as a result of regular CITRIX failures, it is a possibility that some councillors might resort to using alternative providers such as AOL, hotmail and gmail when working from home. Is the Mayor aware that if alternative providers are used, electronic correspondence would be sent outside the council's data protection systems and will he please resolve the contractual issues with Agilisys and ensure councillors are provided with a reliable and secure e-mail system that can be easily accessed from home?

Response by Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources

The Council's internet and email security policy requires all council business to be conducted using the Council's email system and not by private email accounts. This is required to ensure the Council manages its affairs in line with the Data Protection Act and to ensure confidential and sensitive information is managed securely.

All members were invited to training around information governance in May 2014 and both sessions were well attended.

There have been intermittent issues in accessing the Council's Citrix platform. These are regrettable but limited in occurrence and officers continue to work with Agilisys to resolve these and ensuring remedial action is taken.

Separately, we are reviewing the ICT infrastructure as part of the planned contractual arrangement with our provider.

8.21 Question from Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah

The London Ambulance Service has been receiving very high numbers of calls in recent weeks and came under severe pressure over the Christmas and New Year period. The air ambulance for the Capital is reported to be shut down for a few weeks because they cannot afford a second helicopter. The A&E waiting times are at a 10 year high. Can the Lead Member inform us how the Conservative-led Government cuts are affecting the key public services Londoners and people in Tower Hamlets rely on, especially when it comes to A&E waiting times at local hospitals and ambulance services?

Response by Councillor Abdul Asad, Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing

There have been tonnes of reports that agree with the sentiment that this government's cuts are taking us back to levels of inequality that mirror the 1930s.

And it is really starting to show in our public services.

Current performance at the Royal London is that only 83% of A&E attendances are meeting the 4 hour wait target -12% below the national target of 95%.

This is driven by increased length of stay of patients admitted (which reduces bed capacity) and increased attendances at A&E. And with our own GPs practices affected by cuts to their funding, it is no wonder that there are more people going to A&E.

These cuts are affecting the ability of local health services to meet the health care needs of the population.

And whilst the CCG and the council are doing all they can, it is distressing to see the effects that these cuts are having on the health of our society, especially the most vulnerable. This is a national issue and one that everyone should care about – I don't want to live in a society where your chances, your happiness and your health in life are decided by profit.

8.22 Question from Councillor Harun Miah

Could the Cabinet Member tell us what the Council is doing to improve the child protection in Tower Hamlets and how can we ensure that officers are doing whatever to support so that no vulnerable child slips through the net and is safe?

Response by Councillor Gulam Robbani, Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services

The Council takes its responsibilities for protecting vulnerable children very seriously.

Vulnerable children and young people are supported by a range of early help services (such as children's centres, health visitors and schools) as well as the specialist social work services provided by the council.

Child protection services are the subject of continuous monitoring, quality assurance and improvement. Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Board (THSCB), Children and Families Partnership Board and ESCW Managers monitor services on a regular basis; both the THSCB and the Department quality assure the work that is being done through regular audits; a comprehensive training and development programme, innovations in social work practice (such as the Department for Education funded "Signs of Safety Project" working with Professor Eileen Munro) and engagement with centres of excellence ensure that we are at the forefront of practice and doing the best by our vulnerable young people.

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