

# **LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

## **COUNCIL MEETING – 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2015**

### **Report of Mayor to Council**

Openness is important, and as a part of my commitment to transparency, it is my intention to publish a report for each Council meeting, summarising my actions over the past period. The dead hand of bureaucracy may see this as an affront to the processes of the Council. The report, will not cut across the proper decision-making of the Council. The report will end with a list of meetings and diary highlights associated with my role as Mayor. I have attempted to identify all the key meetings I should report to Councillors and the public but inevitably it does not capture every encounter in my daily work.

### **Key Events**

In the past few weeks, since my election on June 11<sup>th</sup>, I have been coming to grips with the internal working of Mulberry Place.

I have met most 'key' managers – those in the top two tiers – and I have attempted to meet other staff, by both touring Mulberry Place and by attending, on invitation, the previously arranged Staff Conference. I intend to visit other workplaces and to meet staff there too.

I have appointed a Cabinet, with allocated portfolios. I have been getting a grip on the Cabinet process of decision-making. Alongside this there has been work to revisit the Strategic Plan to ensure that a redrafted version reflects new Mayoral priorities, as outlined in my Manifesto and election promises.

I have met the Commissioners, principally Sir Ken Knight, to discuss their objectives and the ways we might work together. I have been attempting to digest the Best Value Action Plan and other actions flowing from their directions. I have been clear that while I will actively cooperate with the Commissioners it is a test of the good health of the Council that we should secure their earliest reasonable departure, with perhaps a one by one withdrawal of their Directions.

One of the Directions concerns Grants and I asked Cllr Rachael Saunders to work with me in addressing the concerns in this area. Another concerns senior staff appointments, and I have met with officers to understand this process and ensure I am involved in it.

I have been briefed, as you would expect, on staffing and key management matters. Each of these will be progressed through the proper machinery of the Council and its decision-making, as necessary.

I have been considering the best structure for a 'Mayor's Office'. I envisage a far smaller office, both physically and in terms of staffing, from that of my predecessor. This will save money. It will involve some changes to the floor layout at Mulberry Place on the First Floor, although I have required that the costs of these be kept to a minimum.

As a part of these changes, I am ensuring that a Parlour, for receiving visitors and for small civic events, is recreated on the First Floor. I envisage that the Speaker will use this space, but that it might occasionally be used by me, or others, to receive guests too.

As I am currently receiving two salaries, I have followed the principle used by AMs who become MPs, by foregoing 2/3rds of my City Hall salary. I have done so however as a saving to the Tower Hamlets budget. This allows me an advantage in terms of pension contributions and it has enabled a transfer to be made creating a budget for the Speaker for this year. I think it is important that our civic leader should have a budget allowing him to perform his role with some dignity on behalf of local people. My term at City Hall will end in May next year. The cost of a by-election would be ruinous for a quite short tenure for a successor, and the view, across parties, is that by-elections for myself or the three Conservatives who became MPs in May, would not be sensible. This applies also of course to the current London Mayor.

I have been appointed by the Mayor of London to the Board of the London Legacy Development Corporation, and will endeavour to maximise influence of and benefits for the Borough there. I have made or am making a number of appointments of others to outside bodies and these will be reported through the proper means. May I thank those who have served the Borough on outside bodies and whose terms have come to an end.

I have received briefings on a range of matters, on which future meetings of the Council and cabinet will deliberate. Each of these will be dealt with in their proper way through the decision-making processes of the Council but the briefings have included ones to better understand key policies and decisions needed on the budget, civic buildings, planning policies, and the impact of Government policy in areas including education and publicity.

I have made a series of visits to organisations in the Borough, as listed in the Diary section of this report. I aim to make regular visits, ideally at least one a day, although this may prove optimistic given other diary pressures.

I am also holding a weekly surgery, for which residents are able to book appointments. Since I took up office I have been able to meet and assist over 30 individuals and families with their concerns.

On most days I attend meetings, or have desk time, at Mulberry Place. I currently aim to be at my desk by about 7am, unless I have an early external meeting. Roughly one day a week I attend meetings or work at my desk at City Hall. Most weekends I will work at Mulberry Place on a Saturday morning until early or mid-afternoon, and on Sundays at City Hall. Most evenings I have appointments outside of the Town Hall, unless at meetings there.

### **Cabinet & Mayoral Decisions**

All of the following will be properly and formally reported through committee papers and Mayoral Decisions.

The first formal Cabinet meeting will take place on 28<sup>th</sup> July. It is due to include reports in various areas including a revised Strategic Plan and Budget, a report on budget performance, the Best Value Plan, Mental Health Services, Budget Adjustments, Waste Management, Early Years Public

Health Services, and the Gangs & Youth Violence Strategy,. All of these represent areas which are a priority for my administration.

The South Quay Masterplan was due to be considered at this Cabinet meeting. This report was inherited from the previous administration and is of deep importance locally, especially to residents on the Isle of Dogs. Following discussions with the Cabinet Member, Cabinet and officers, I have decided to take a deeper look at the report to see whether it can better meet local needs and aspirations, before it is progressed to Cabinet.

I have in addition signed three Mayoral Decisions (at the date of writing this report) on the Rich Mix Centre, appointments to the Board of Tower Hamlets Homes, and entering into a lease for accommodation for Homeless Families. The decision on the Rich Mix Centre was called in and I was delighted to be able to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss it with members. I look forward to many other happy appearances at O&S. It is part of the culture of openness and accountability I want to engender.

## **Engagements & meetings**

### **15 June 2015**

- Introductory meetings at Mulberry Place. Office set-up.

### **16 June 2015**

- Walkabout with Head of Paid Service at Mulberry Place
- Interview with ITV London
- Interview with East London Advertiser – Mike Brook
- Briefing on Medium Term Financial Position/Transformation Agenda
- Opened Philosothon at Manorfield Primary School
- Met with Cllr Dave Chesterton
- Met with Cllr Amina Ali
- Attended Commissioner's Workshop regarding Chief Executive Priorities/ Objectives

### **17 June 2015**

- Discussed Mayor's Office Layout
- Introductory Meeting with the Lead Commissioner

### **18 June 2015**

- Induction: Committee Structures
- DCLG Directions/Best Value Action Plan
- Meeting to prepare for possible July 8 Cabinet
- Mayor's Surgery
- LoveBox Briefing at Whitechapel Idea Store

## **19 June 2015**

- Meeting with Head of Paid Service & a consultant on structure of Mayor's Office
- Mayor's Introductory Meeting with Corporate Management Network
- Met with Service Head of Children's Social Care, and discussed social care issues
- Attended Official Opening of the Frank Whipple Estate, Limehouse

## **22 June 2015**

- Attended and spoke at Healthy Schools & Healthy Early Years Celebration at the Excel Centre.
- Manifesto Discussion with officers – alterations to Strategic Plan
- Labour Group Meeting
- Iftar Event – Aldgate

## **23 June 2015**

- Telephone interview with Municipal Journal
- Meeting with a local family to discuss constituent issues
- Met with Cllr Dave Chesterton

## **24 June 2015**

- Briefing: Working with Partners
- Mayor's Meeting with CMT
- Continuation of Manifesto Discussion regarding Strategic Plan
- Mayor's meeting with Commissioners
- Pre-Council Labour Group Meeting
- Reconvened Council (AGM)

## **25 June 2015**

- Visited Rainbow Playgroup – Meeting with Christine Armstrong
- Attended & spoke to Staff Conference at Troxy
- Interview with East End Life – Helen Watson
- Discussions regarding possible Budget & Medium Term Financial Plan changes
- Mayor's Surgery
- Iftar Event – Whitechapel

## **26 June 2015**

- Meeting on Housing Matters – Decent Homes/Leaseholders/Tower Hamlets Homes
- Briefing on Whitechapel Vision

- Telephone conversation with Sir Eddie Lister regarding Regeneration issues

### **27 June 2015**

- Iftar Event – Shadwell

### **28 June 2015**

- Attended Gypsy Traveller Summer Fair at Mile End Park
- Iftar Event – The Collective of Bangladeshi School Governors
- Iftar Event - Betar Bangla
- Iftar event – Brick Lane

### **29 June 2015**

- 1.1 with Acting Head of Communications
- 1.1 with Service Head for Culture, Learning and Leisure
- Regular update with Cllr Sirajul Islam

### **30 June 2015**

- Briefing for Health & Wellbeing Board
- Discussion re. Civic Centre
- 1.1 with Service Head for Corporate Strategy and Equality
- Met with Cllr Joshua Peck
- Waste Management Workshop
- Meeting with Cllr Rachael Saunders and Director of Education, Social Care and Wellbeing with a potential Service Head
- Iftar Event – Whitechapel
- Iftar Event – Bow

### **1 July 2015**

- Attended and spoke at Meeting with Tower Hamlets Headteachers
- Met with Head of Paid Service, Cllr Amy Whitelock Gibbs & a potential interim Director of Adult's Services
- Attended end of THAMES Celebration Concert at York Hall
- Iftar event at Café Grill Brick Lane

### **2 July 2015**

- Briefing regarding Community Safety & Policing
- Visit to the Oasis Academy, Silvertown
- Human Appeal Official Opening, Whitechapel
- Opening of Memorial Bench for Tayyabs' Owner
- Met with Assistant Commissioner Helen King & Chief Superintendent Andy Ewing

- Mayor's Surgery
- Iftar Event – Stepney
- Iftar Event – Baitul Aman Mosque

### **3 July 2015**

- Breakfast Event – East End Community Foundation,
- Met election agent to sign accounts
- Chief Executive Recruitment – Telephone Conversations
- Met with consultant to discuss Mayor's office structure
- Met with Cllr Amy Whitelock Gibbs
- Iftar Event – NTV – Bow
- Iftar Event – Spitalfields

### **4 July 2015**

- Iftar Event – Darul Ummah Mosque

### **5 July 2015**

- Attended LIMEfest 2015
- Iftar Event – Bow
- Iftar Event – Poplar

### **6 July 2015**

- Meeting to discuss the Strategic Plan & Budget
- Met a constituent regarding Barts Housing
- Catch up with Cllr Rachael Saunders
- Meeting regarding Directorate Issues – Cllr Rachael Saunders and Head of Paid Service
- Iftar Event – Bromley by Bow Labour Party
- Iftar Event – Spitalfields

### **7 July 2015**

- Briefing for O&S – Rich Mix
- Health & Wellbeing Board Meeting
- Attended Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Iftar Event – Spitalfields

### **8 July 2015**

- Briefing regarding a property matter - Sovereign Court
- Discussion regarding Communications
- Iftar Event – Brick Lane
- Iftar Event – Weavers

## **9 July 2015**

- Visit to Canary Wharf College
- Met constituent at Island Gardens
- Meeting with Sir George Iacobescu at Canary Wharf
- Rich Mix de-brief, and response to Overview and Scrutiny committee resolution
- Meeting with former Mayor, Abdul Sardar
- Meeting of Steering Group for Isle of Dogs OAPF Planning Framework, at City Hall
- Hosted 'Uprising' Event at City Hall

## **10 July 2015**

- Visited a constituent at Mile End
- Iftar Event – Whitechapel

## **12 July 2015**

- Iftar Event – Brick lane

**John Biggs, Mayor**