

# Agenda Item 7

## **Mayor John Biggs**

### **Report of Mayor to Council September 2015**

This is my second report to the Council. Given the Summer break, it covers a period of almost two months, in which there is much to report.

#### **Key Events**

Over the past two months I have continued to work with officers cabinet members, key stakeholders and groups, to build a good understanding of the key local issues. Progress is good but the workload is heavy.

My cabinet has met twice formally and several times informally, both with and without officers, to get on top of our priorities and necessary decisions. I meet with senior officers and cabinet members, and other members, regularly.

We have recently, as Council knows, appointed a new Chief Executive, Will Tuckley, and I am pleased to confirm that after some discussions he will start work on 19<sup>th</sup> October. I look forward to his arrival.

I have been maintaining good relationships with the Commissioners. This is vital to ending our recent difficulties and moving the Borough forwards. I recently also met the Secretary of State at CLG and discussed Tower Hamlets matters and anxieties with him.

Getting a grip on the processes of decision-making and implementation has been an experience and I am clear that much needs to be done to improve and streamline decision-making in a way that better meets local needs and the need for progress. I have been frustrated at the glacially slow pace of implementing the Rich Mix decision, as an example.

My commitment to Transparency remains. I have attended O&S twice, and am developing a transparency protocol for cabinet to consider. I am happy to be working with the O&S scrutiny into this same subject.

In addition to recording formal decisions, the instruction I gave to unfreeze S106 funds for the Isle of Dogs Community Foundation (now part of the EECF) was an example of an action not needing formal decision and I am anxious to ensure such actions are recorded and reported too.

I have moved to a new office, less than half the size of the old one, and, together with the reconfiguration of the rest of the Members Accommodation, this cost approximately £28,000. This is about a fifth the cost of the previous Mayor's refurbishments. It has included the reintroduction of a Mayor's (Speakers) Parlour.

On most days I continue to 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. I am also attending, less frequently, for meetings or work at my desk at City Hall. Most weekends I still work at Mulberry Place. I regret this, but currently needs must. Most evenings I have appointments outside of the Town Hall, unless at meetings there.

It remains a priority to be out in community and my diary record, below, lists a number but not all commitments. My weekly surgery continues to be well attended and highlights a range of matters, principally around housing, its

supply and affordability and homelessness, but covering other matters too. I receive a large postbag too, which we endeavour to respond to speedily.

On 4<sup>th</sup> September I attended the funeral of little Alexia Walenkaki, who was tragically killed in a playground accident earlier in the Summer. It was a moving and sad occasion. I am of course committed to our council learning from and cooperating with all investigations.

I recently attended the unveiling of the Columbia Market memorial, to an air raid shelter tragedy in the second world war. It is important that we remember the sacrifice and past of our Borough. And on 12<sup>th</sup> September I unveiled a memorial plaque to the opening of Island Gardens by Will Crooks, a leading politician who helped shape our borough.

I have visited or met with the leaderships of a number of our schools, in particular to discuss plans and needs. Ensuring we have excellent schools, and that we support them, will always be a top priority.

I have been involved in deliberations on a number of matters, quickly summarised below:

*East End Life:* I have instructed that a Communications Review take place and that, as an interim, notice be given that the paper reduce its publication frequency to fortnightly.

*Refugees:* I have instructed that the Borough prepare ourselves to receive a small number of refugees, into private sector housing but with appropriate support. We are awaiting clarity from Government on the support packages available. It is the right thing to do and I have endeavoured to meet local anxieties where expressed.

*Housing:* I and cabinet members have met with the Chief Executives of One Housing Group and Circle Anglia. We expressed our disquiet with their performance and actions and further reports will be made on this.

*TUSH:* I have considered and shared with members a report on this matter referred to me. This is attached to this report.

*Old Flo:* I set up a working group to consider, assuming we achieve final victory in our legal struggle to assert ownership, the best location for the Sculpture in our Borough.

*Ripper Museum:* I have strenuously opposed this, in my view, unwelcome exhibition in our Borough. We continue to review the circumstances in which permission was granted on the basis of representations that bear a quite grotesquely limited, in my view, relationship to those made in the application. Almost without a doubt the application would have been strenuously opposed had its intent been fully known and I find this deeply troubling.

*Bishopsgate Goods Yard:* We are beginning to think about how the Council should best address this large planning application, on which little political thinking appears previously to have taken place. Its impact on the Shoreditch and Brick Lane areas will be considerable and further examination is needed.

*South Quay Master Plan:* We are publishing an amended strategy which will go to the next Cabinet. However I am clear that, alone, this will not and cannot address the range of local concerns about development.

*Local Plan:* We are starting the review of the Local Plan. This is a vital piece of work, about how the future of the borough will evolve. It will among other things need to examine how we can better shape development including on the Isle of Dogs. It is important that members, and the community, are engaged.

*Victoria Park:* We are considering the scale and nature of future events in the Park, and other open spaces.

### **Cabinet & Mayoral Decisions**

The Cabinet has met twice since my last report and considered a number of matters. In addition, Mayoral Decisions have been signed on:

- Disposal of 296 Bethnal Green Road by Auction - (Response to Call-In)
- Appointments to External Bodies 2015/16
- Tower Hamlets Homes Board Governance (Cllr Members)
- Rich Mix Litigation (Response to Call In)
- Shipton House
- Tower Hamlets Homes Board Governance (Independent Members)
- Bow Bridge CPO - Amendment to Post Titles in Delegation

### **Engagement & Meetings**

- **13 July 2015**
  - School Visit – Bow School
  - Meeting with Corporate Director Development & Renewal on Service Issues
  - Meeting with East End Homes
  - Meeting on Development Issues
  - Preparation of Eid Message
- **14 July 2015**
  - London Council Congress of Leaders
  - Meeting of Local Partnerships across London
  - Budget Preparation
  - Chief Executive Appointment – Long listing
- **15 July 2015**
  - School Visit – Stephen Hawking School
  - Commissioners Meeting re. Best Value Plan
- **16 July 2015**
  - Meeting with Borough Police Commander
  - Meeting with Clinical Commissioning Group
  - Preparation for Whitechapel Strategic Board
  - Meeting with Mayor of Hackney
  - Mayor's Surgery
- **17 July 2015**
  - Meeting with Acting Corporate Director of Resources
  - Meeting with Young Mayor
  - Meeting on Whitechapel Development

- Meeting on Spitalfields Development
- Meeting with Acting Head of Paid Services
- **20 July 2015**
  - Meeting with Unite Trade Union
  - Press Conference with Local Media
  - Eid Event – Whitechapel
- **21 July 2015**
  - Meeting with Acting Head of Paid Service
  - Meeting with Professor Simon Gaskell Principal, Queen Mary University of London
  - Meeting with Councillor Joshua Peck
  - Board Meeting – London Legacy Development Corporation
  - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
  - Whitechapel Strategic Partnership Board
- **22 July 2015**
  - Meeting with Acting Monitoring Officer
  - Full Council
- **23 July 2015**
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for Resources
  - Mayor’s Surgery
- **24 July 2015**
  - Meeting Tower Hamlets Christian Prayer Group
  - Meeting East End Community Foundation
  - Meeting on Bishopgate Goods Yard Development
  - Eid Event – Mile End
- **25 July 2015**
  - Bancroft TMC Fun Day (?)
  - Holland Estate Resident Event (?)
- **26 July 2015**
  - Opening Stepney Green Fair
  - Home visit to constituent
- **27 July 2015**
  - Meeting with Interim Director of Adult Services on Mental Health Issues
  - Meeting with St John Estate TRA
  - Meeting on Asset Strategy
  - Meeting with Deputy Mayor of London (Housing)
  - Meeting with Interim Head of Children Services
  - Meeting with Councillor David Edgar
  - Meeting with Acting Head of Paid Service
- **28 July 2015**
  - Commencement Ceremony, St George

- Local Plan Review
- Meeting with Commissioners on Third Sector Strategy and Grants
- Cabinet & King George's Field Charity Meeting
- **29 July 2015**
  - Meeting with Service Head for Corporate Strategy & Equality on Communications
  - Meeting on Asset Strategy
  - Meeting with Poplar HARCA
  - Meeting with Acting Head of Paid Service
  - Chief Executive Appointment – Shortlisting
  - Commissioners Decision Making Meeting
- **30 July 2015**
  - Meeting with Jim Fitzpatrick MP
  - TV interview on Whitechapel Development
  - Meeting with Councillor Rodwell, Barking & Dagenham
  - Mayor's Surgery
- **31 July 2015**
  - Meeting – Waste Management
  - Meeting with Councillor Khatun & Service Head for Community Service on Policing and Community Safety
  - Meeting with Unite Trade Union
  - Meeting with Cllr Clyde Loakes, Waltham Forest
- **1 August 2015**
  - Attendance at A Great Day Out – Victoria Park
  - Attendance at Millwall Rugby Club Open Day
  - Awards Presentation at Al Isharah Deaf Run
- **3 August 2015**
  - Meeting with City Gateway
  - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
- **4 August 2015**
  - Visit to Multi-Faith Burial Site – Kemnal Park
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
  - Meeting with Amy Whitelock Gibbs & Interim Director of Adult Services
  - Meeting with Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government
- **5 August 2015**
  - Meeting with Commissioners
- **6 August 2015**
  - Meeting with Corporate Directors Development & Renewal
  - Meeting with Osmani Trust
  - Meeting with Apasen
  - Meeting with Mick Sweeney, Chief Executive, One Housing Group

- Mayor's Surgery
- **7 August 2015**
  - Move to new office
  - Meeting with Corporate Director of Resources
  - Meeting with Tony Pidgley, Chairman of Berkeley Group
  - Visit Arbour Youth Centre
  - Visit to Roche House & meeting with residents
- **8 August 2015**
  - Selby Estate Tenants Association Fun Day
- **10 August 2015**
  - Visit Aspen Court Residential Care Home, Carers Week
  - Visit to Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park
  - Meeting with Corporate Director Development & Renewal
  - Meeting with Corporate Director of Resources
  - Meeting with Councillor Marc Francis
- **11 August 2015**
  - Meeting with Councillor Joshua Peck
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
  - Meeting with Mark Rodgers, Chief Executive, Circle Housing
- **12 August 2015**
  - Interview for post of Chief Executive
- **13 August 2015**
  - Meeting with Commissioners
  - Meeting with Community Faith Leaders
  - Mayor's Surgery
- **14 August 2015**
  - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
  - Meeting with Corporate Director Development & Renewal
  - Meeting with Corporate Director of Resources
  - Meeting with Solace on culture change work
  - Meeting with Service Head Corporate Property & Capital Delivery on property issues
  - Meeting with Rainbow Hamlets
  - Meeting with Service Head Children's & Adults Resources
- **19 August 2015**
  - Meeting with Commissioners
  - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
- **20 August 2015**
  - Mayor's Surgery
- **21 August 2015**
  - Meeting with Sir George Iacobescu, Canary Wharf Group

- Meeting with Interim Director of Children Services
- Meeting with Corporate Director of Law, Probity & Governance
- **25 August 2015**
  - Meeting with Corporate Director of Resources
  - Meeting with Yvonne Arrowsmith, Chief Executive of East Thames Group
  - Meeting with John Synnuck, CEO of Swan Housing
- **26 August 2015**
  - Meeting with Commissioners
  - Full Council Meeting
- **27 August 2015**
  - Mayor's Surgery
- **1 September 2015**
  - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
  - Womens Event with Councillor Shiria Khatun
  - Meeting with Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation
  - Meeting with Professor Simon Gaskell of Queen Mary University of London on developments
  - Meeting with Councillor Joshua Peck
  - Meeting with Acting Head of Paid Service
  - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
- **2 September 2015**
  - Meeting with Commissioners
  - Meeting of Sonali Working Group
- **3 September 2015**
  - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
  - Meeting with Italian Bangladeshi Welfare Association
  - Meeting with Corporate Director of Resources
  - Meeting with Centre for London
  - Opening of fountains, Resolution Plaza
  - Site Visit, Ocean Estate
  - Mayor's Surgery
- **4 September 2015**
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake on HRA
  - Meeting with Service Head, Community Service on Police matters
  - Meeting with Sharon Ament, Director of Docklands Museum
  - Home visit to constituent
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake on Local Plan
  - Unveiling of Portrait of George Lansbury at Local History Library
- **7 September 2015**
  - Meeting with Jim Fitzpatrick MP
  - Meeting with Acting Head of Paid Service
  - Meeting with Representatives of St Pauls Way Trust School

- Site Visit to Ravenscroft Rose Garden
- Meeting with Interim Service Head of Public Realm on Cleaning
- Meeting on Manchester Road
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee
  
- **8 September 2015**
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
  - Cabinet
  
- **9 September 2015**
  - Visit to Oaklands School
  - Commissioners Best Value Program Review Board
  - Meeting with Corporate Director Development Renewal
  - Meeting with Corporate Director of Resources
  - Received delegation of Petitioners from 38 Degrees – presenting petition on the Jack The Ripper Museum
  - Meeting with Commissioners
  
- **10 September 2015**
  - Opening of Tesco Store, Gladstone Place
  - Mayor's Surgery
  - AGM – The Royal Foundation of St Katherine
  
- **11 September 2015**
  - Meeting with London Newcastle
  - Meeting with Councillor Shiria Khatun & Service Head, Community Service on policing
  - Event Celebrating member of staff's long service
  - Meeting with Muslim Staff Association
  - Meeting with Service Head, Corporate Strategy & Equality on Communications
  
- **12 September 2015**
  - Unveiling of Plaque of Will Crooks, Island Gardens

### **TUSH Housing Group**

At its meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2015 the Council received a petition which sought to allow three individual members of the TUSH Co-op Housing to continue to use 62 Bruce Road E3, reversing a previously agreed Cabinet decision to refurbish this property as one amongst a number of short life properties

The Council decision on this item at its July meeting was to call on me to look closely at this situation and carefully consider the decision made by the previous Mayor.

I have considered the reference from Council, received a briefing from officers and have made a decision that the Council should proceed with seeking possession of 62 Bruce Road.



In making this decision I have taken into account the following:

1. The Council must act with compassion towards all residents and particularly towards vulnerable residents. One of the remaining TUSH residents is vulnerable by virtue of age. Each of the residents needs to be assessed to ensure that their housing needs are fully understood.
2. However, the TUSH housing 'coop', which was established to provide short-life housing several decades ago, is no longer viable as a Cooperative, particularly since the previous administration chose to take back all its houses and has moved residents out of all but two remaining properties. Had that decision not been made an alternative future for the Cooperative might have been viable, providing a mixture of family homes and homes for the remaining TUSH residents. This option however no longer remains.
3. To emphasise a point, this was a short-life housing project, and as the name suggests was not at its formation intended to provide permanent housing for the Coop or its residents. It is not clear whether any of the current residents were in the original Cooperative or, if not, how they were selected to be residents.
4. The properties by virtue of their age and disrepair need to be refurbished. At a time of massive housing pressure the opportunity exists to provide at 62 Bruce Road a single family dwelling. A budget exists for this work. Furthermore, the adjoining property at 64 Bruce Road requires structural works which are shared with and most reasonably carried out at the same time with 62 Bruce Road. It should be noted however that the other remaining property, at Mount Terrace in Whitechapel, presents quite serious cost challenges to refurbish and is not yet in a position to be converted within the current budgets.
5. The question of whether a concessionary decision should be made to allow the TUSH residents to remain - three single men, one with apparent or impending mobility problems and needs for a more suitable property than 62 Bruce Road can easily be modified to meet - in a house which could become available for one of the many thousands of families on the waiting list or in temporary homeless accommodation, is a balanced one. The fact remains however that the property post-refurbishment is best suited to a family whose needs it meets.
6. The remaining residents have been offered concessionary nominations to suitable 1 bedroom properties and this offer should remain. Each resident needs to be assessed for any specialist support and needs and where these are identified he needs to be supported by the appropriate Council or Council-commissioned agencies. Where necessary a longer term support package should be provided.
7. With this condition, and any other reasonable conditions that assessment may suggest are necessary or reasonably desirable, the Council should proceed with the possession of 62 Bruce Road, and making concessionary offers to the residents there. However, this will require the cooperation of the

residents. The fact that the Council is undertaking a far more detailed and supportive strategy than any public landlord would ordinarily take should be emphasised. If possession is secured without cooperation, the Council should seek to provide support to any vulnerable resident so evicted.

8. The possibility of all residents remaining, on a licence, at Mount Terrace has been explored, given that this property is not yet ready to be repaired or otherwise dealt with. However, this property is controlled by the TUSH coop not the Council and is also in a poor state of repair. Current safety and duty of care obligations would make it impossible for the Council to suggest such a move, particularly for a vulnerable resident.