

TOWER HAMLETS | COMMISSIONERS

Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets
Executive Mayor's Office
Tower Hamlets Town Hall
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
London
E14 2BG

cc. Secretary of State for Communities and Local
Government
Councillor Peter Golds, Leader of the Conservative
Group
Councillor Oliur Rahman, Leader of the Independent
Group

16 September 2015

Dear Mayor,

Commissioners response to your letter dated 15 September and the first sixth month update of the Best Value Plan dated 14 September 2015

We wrote to your predecessor Lutfur Rahman on 18th March 2015 setting out our views on the initial submission of London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Best Value Strategy and Action Plan produced in compliance with the Directions dates 17th December 2014. This note sets out our response to the update to that Plan dated 14th September submitted by you to the Secretary of State in your letter dated 15th September 2015.

It was disappointing, that, due to the failure of the previous leadership of the Council to effectively respond to the original Directions, the Secretary of State found it necessary to issue two further Directions, dated 29th April 2015 and 6th May 2015.

The April Direction dealt with the establishment and appointment to a post to be designated Head of Paid Service. On 17th April Commissioners wrote to you confirming the substantial discharge of the actions required under this Direction. We welcome Mr Tuckley's appointment and look forward to him working in partnership with you and your colleagues to drive the improvements and changes necessary for the Council to exit the Direction regime.

In March we recorded our view that some parts of the Council had approached the imposition of Directions in a defensive manner rather than using the opportunity provided to drive through the required changes. Those parts of the Council that had embraced the opportunity to improve have continued to make progress but it was

Sir Ken Knight CBE QFSM | Max Caller CBE | Chris Allison CBE | Alan Wood CBE

The commissioners were nominated by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government under the Local Government Act 1999.

Enquiries to:

Tower Hamlets Commissioners
Tower Hamlets Town Hall
6th Floor Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
London
E14 2BG

Commissioners@towerhamlets.gov.uk

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

evident that in the resistant areas progress only appeared to us to be evident after the Mayoral by-election result had been absorbed. We regret this lost opportunity to move the whole Authority forward. However, we appreciate the efforts that you have gone to in driving the necessary change forward since your election.

In this letter we wish to highlight four specific areas for particular attention

1. Delivering Outcomes rather than Activity;
2. Cultural Change;
3. Election Management; and
4. Communications.

1. Outcomes

The Best Value process requires a strategy and action plan. We noted in March that it was intended over the ensuing 6 months to examine each element of the submitted plan to define measurable outcomes, interim goals and timelines. The updated plans submitted to the Secretary of State start the process to achieve this but do not yet contain sufficient evidence that the activity defined is directed towards an appropriate outcome and that the timelines and milestones are not completely defined. We are concerned that without this clarity, embedding the necessary changes will not have occurred and in fact change may only be skin deep. We welcome that you have agreed to Chair the Best Value Board both to achieve the outcome based results that are necessary and the ownership of the process by the Council.

2. Cultural change

We agreed that this programme should be delayed to enable the newly elected Mayor and his Chief Executive to influence its direction. Nevertheless, we note that all organisations display cultural norms, either set by what is seen to be acceptable and expedient by the bottom or led from the top to achieve specific goals. Many of the specific instances of failure to apply good standards of local government practice and procedure, that we have observed, stem from this bottom up culture even if it is ascribed to higher direction. So, for example, poor procurement practice in the past is attributed to the former Mayor's intervention even if there is no evidence whatever to support this belief.

A fundamental part of effective leadership is for both Members and Senior Officers to model the culture required. Tower Hamlets has missed having good role models who understand the Executive Mayoral system and can lead the organisation forward in an appropriate way. We do not underestimate the challenge that this poses and welcome your commitment to change the culture.

3. Election Management

The two elections in 2015 demonstrated a marked improvement in practice over the 2014 performance. This only came about with substantial additional support, both financial and physical from outside bodies. It will be necessary to identify, learn from and embed the lessons of the improvement to deliver future elections for the resources that funders are prepared to pay. We will assist in this process by working with the new Chief Executive Officer to embed the lessons learned for future elections.

TOWER HAMLETS | COMMISSIONERS

4. Communications

We welcome your approach to reset activity in this area. We entirely support the fundamental external review of the communications activity that you have commissioned. This will lead to all channels of communication being in their appropriate place with properly defined goals. The print element may fulfil part of this strategy provided its context and goals are defined. In our view, the current print vehicle, East End Life was misused in the past to attempt to achieve inappropriate goals. This legacy is hard to shake off but we recognise the contractual constraints dictate the timescale over which change can be achieved. We are pleased to note your instruction for the publication of the weekly newspaper to assume a fortnightly frequency and pleased to see the commitment embodied in the Best Value Action Plan that East End Life will be fully 'code compliant' by March 2016.

Commissioners have valued the more open and honest approach that is now starting to characterise day to day working. We will play our part in building on the improved relationships at Member and Officer levels to help the Borough make progress.

Yours Sincerely



Sir Ken Knight CBE QFSM DL
Lead Commissioner



Max Caller CBE
Commissioner



Chris Allison CBE
Commissioner



Alan Wood CBE
Commissioner

Sir Ken Knight CBE QFSM | Max Caller CBE | Chris Allison CBE | Alan Wood CBE

The commissioners were nominated by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government under the Local Government Act 1999.

