

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

COUNCIL MEETING

WEDNESDAY 18th NOVEMBER 2015

**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY
MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW, PROBITY AND GOVERNANCE

SUMMARY

1. Set out overleaf are the questions submitted by Members of the Council for response by the Speaker, the Mayor or the relevant Committee/Sub-Committee Chair at the Council meeting on Wednesday 18th November 2015
2. Questions are limited to one per Member per meeting, plus one supplementary question unless the Member has indicated that only a written reply is required and in these circumstances a supplementary question is not permitted.
3. Oral responses are time limited to one minute. Supplementary questions and responses are also time limited to one minute each.
4. There is a time limit of thirty minutes for consideration of Members' questions with no extension of time allowed and any question not answered within this time will be dealt with by way of a written response. The Speaker will decide the time allocated to each question.
5. Members must confine their contributions to questions and answers and not make statements or attempt to debate.

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

25 questions have been received from Members of the Council as follows:-

8.1 Question from Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed

How many families has the council placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks in each of the last three years?

8.2 Question from Councillor Shahed Ali:

As result of a call-in by the Independent Group, part time Mayor John Biggs was forced to reveal his secret decision, taken behind closed doors, about Rich Mix grant funding, resulting in a statement, according to media, which states that there is no longer a court case to recover public money from Rich Mix that was owed to the Council. Rich Mix – an organisation created by Labour and essentially run by Tower Hamlets Labour Party - to be given substantial sums of cash in the millions by Labour Mayor Biggs without seeing a business plan, raises serious questions of potential nepotism and cronyism. Will Mayor John Biggs ensure that all documents, court papers, emails and information relating to Rich Mix is made public immediately according to the practice of transparency, accountability, value for money and open data principles under Transparency Act 2014 and the local authority's Best Value duty placed on him as the Executive Mayor? Contrary to his rhetoric of transparency and openness, information and documents have been hidden away in secret from the public and elected members thus far and part-time Mayor John Biggs has failed to ensure that these are made public, also excluding opposition councillors who have challenged the secret and questionable decision-making and highlighted concerns?

8.3 Question from Councillor Amina Ali:

Can the Mayor outline the next steps for the Civic Centre?

8.4 Question from Councillor Chris Chapman:

In view of the financial restraints facing the council, will the Mayor confirm when the Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity will be fully implemented and when East End Life will be replaced by a quarterly communication?

8.5 Question from Councillor Danny Hassell:

Can you please update the council on what plans you have to continue to improve the life chances of children at the start of their life, and to increase the number of children reaching a good level of development by age 5?

8.6 Question from Councillor Oliur Rahman:

Could the part time Mayor, who still holds two jobs, explain as to how his decision to evict the residents of TUSH (62 Bruce Road) sits with the pre-election Labour campaign and promise by Labour to support them against the Council?

8.7 Question from Councillor Marc Francis:

Will the Lead Member for Adults Services explain the action taken by LBTH following the Care Quality Commission inspection of Pat Shaw House in December 2014, which found serious breaches of regulations relating to repairs and maintenance, medicines management and assessment and care planning by Gateway Housing Association?

8.8 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood:

Will the Mayor inform the Council on the progress of the Isle of Dogs and South Poplar Opportunity Area Planning Framework that was launched by the GLA in July and who the members of the supervisory board are?

8.9 Question from Councillor Dave Chesterton:

The current restrictions on the issue of parking permits for 'car free' properties is causing difficulties for many residents, particularly those with large families. Can the Mayor please give an update on his plans to review controlled parking in the borough?

8.10 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan:

What are Mayor Biggs and relevant Cabinet Member doing in relation to supporting victims of domestic abuse? Can you provide the strategic overview, monitoring of performance and securing budget/funding for this important area which affects many vulnerable people in the Borough – particularly women, children and old people?

8.11 Question from Councillor John Pierce:

Can the lead member give us an update on extending payment options for Tower Hamlets Homes leaseholders for Decent Homes Works?

8.12 Question from Julia Dockerill:

Will the Mayor publish a publicly available list of all unoccupied buildings owned and maintained by the council and all unoccupied and currently unused land in its possession?

8.13 Question from Councillor Md. Maium Miah:

The Government has announced that local councils will retain all the money they raise from business rates. Can the Mayor inform the Council what it means for Tower Hamlets, and how much he expects Tower Hamlets to raise, and how they are going

to use this money? And will he ensure it benefits all sections of the community, particularly small businesses across our Borough?

8.14 Question from Councillor Peter Golds:

Will the Mayor confirm how many funerals have taken place at the council acquired burial site at Kemnal Park, Chislehurst? Will the Mayor indicate the level of subsidy for each of these burials and the cost to the taxpayer?

8.15 Question from Councillor Ohid Ahmed:

Can the Cabinet Member responsible provide monthly and yearly breakdowns of crime levels, particularly murders, taken place in Tower Hamlets since 2010 until present? Could the Cabinet Member also provide brief summary of what kind of crimes have increased and what seem to be the causes and what is the Council doing to address some of these issues, aside from working with Police and stakeholders?

8.16 Question from Councillor Craig Aston:

In view of the escalating anti-social behaviour on Ropemakers Fields, Narrow Street, which has seen fireworks ignited and aimed at resident's windows, will the Mayor request the police to restore order as opposed to remaining in a police car, before driving away, as happened on the weekend of October 31st?

8.17 Question from Councillor Gulam Robbani:

Part time Mayor John Biggs has been quoted that the Council will require £60m worth of cuts to corporate budget. Can the Mayor inform us where did he get this figure from, what areas is he basing his quotes on and what evidence is there to support this claim? And why this important information has not been made available to Members or even discussed fully with an official report at Overview and Scrutiny Committee before going public with his claim? Is that what he means by his new so called transparency and accountability rhetoric that he can just pluck figures from thin air without informing, putting a report or a proper discussion? Will he ensure that concerns raised by the Trade Unions and staff/officers at large are fully taken on board and made public and any budget proposals are backed up with meaningful information and data rather than ambiguous headline figures and spin?

8.18 Question from Councillor Mahbub Alam:

At the last Council meeting, it is recollected that a Councillor stated that East End Life (EEL) costs the Council £1.5m – can the Mayor tell us if that is the correct figure because you (Mayor or Cabinet) did not challenge this figure or seemed concerned about its use – Does it mean that Mayor Biggs and Labour administration agrees with this figure, if not what is the current cost? Also can the Mayor circulate the following information in relation to EEL and wider communications review, in writing to all members, as part of the response:

- The business case and value for money report/work about EEL that we understand had been produced to articulate its value and contribution
- A copy of letter written by the Unison about EEL
- Who will you consult about the proposal to reduce it from weekly to as little as quarterly to meet Government diktat – non binding - and how it is being publicised and consulted upon – keeping in mind residents feedback about consultation recently to OSTC consultation. (If not already being done, can the consultation be extended through residents associations, Council's own online e-account, posters and information in idea stores)
- What is the risk of job losses and/or any kind of redeployment or redundancies
- What is the purpose and objective of consultation
- Why the consultation questions were being changed on daily basis and who is amending them. Are any councillors involved and who are they and what has been their contribution?
- How will you reach out to hard to reach/engage residents
- How will you reach out to those whose first language is not English
- Who will be conducting the review and when? When will it commence, what are the scope, time-scale and cost involved?
- Will the Members be consulted and how?
- Has/will the Equality Impact Assessments and risk assessment been/be carried out? If not why not and when will it take place? Will it be public and available to all Members?

8.19 Question from Councillor Abdul Asad:

Following 29 October announcement by the DCLG in relation to Tower Hamlets Commissioners, Can you please provide the details about:

- What details have now been taken away from the Commissioners and have been given back to the elected representatives as a result of this announcement?
- What powers still remain with the Commissioners?
- What role, if any, have the Commissioners played or will play in setting out the budget?
- Given that most of the requirements have been fulfilled, what endeavours are being made to ensure that Commissioners – who are costing the residents and the Council a lot of money - £800 per day for the lead Commissioner, and there are a few of them at various rates – are gone back now rather than in 6 months' time or until 2017?

- Why the Mayor Biggs has been so reluctant to officially ask the Commissioners, appointed by Eric Pickles, to leave publicly?
- Why the Labour Leader's motion was not debated in the Chamber, despite Labour majority, which among usual political rhetoric and point scoring had a genuine reason and motive, calling for Commissioners' withdrawal ?
- Was assurance(s) given or sought not met ? and if these assurances were met what were these - in Mayor Biggs secret meeting with the Secretary of State of Communities and Local Government, accompanied by Deputy Mayor Rachel Saunders but apparently without the other two Deputy Mayors, Islam and Khatun - since Commissioners are essentially staying put, despite spin and intense rumours that Commissioners will be completely and comprehensively leaving Tower Hamlets, in a matter of days – and these rumours have been going on since August 2015 yet this announcement has been disappointing.

8.20 Question from Councillor Mohammad Mustaqim:

Can the Mayor confirm that he will stand up to Tory Government cuts - including welfare cuts, tax credit cuts and all others that are targeting many of our residents and particularly working families - as well as protecting all frontline services in his forthcoming budget by carefully taking advantage of new Government announcement on 5th September 2015 (which Independent Group Cllr Rabina Khan argued for locally and it is welcomed by us, provided equality, fairness and safety net issues are addressed in the details) that local Councils will be able to retain all their Business rates ?

8.21 Question from Councillor Harun Miah:

Boris Johnson's decision to take control of the proposed redevelopment of Bishopsgate Goodsyrd comes after an appeal from the developers and has the effect of preventing Tower Hamlets and Hackney councillors deciding the scheme in planning committee where local people can raise objections easily. The project, which includes two skyscrapers of 47 and 43 storeys and 100 high-end shops and offices and 1300 homes (of which only 10 per cent will be affordable) has been slated by local campaign groups who fear it will drive out the area's creative industries, force local traders on Brick Lane and Bethnal Green Road out of business and cast a shadow over local housing estates. What is the personal and official position as Mayor of Tower Hamlets about the Goodsyrd development with 43 and 46 storeys Tower blocks (is it just that he is not happy about the height and minor concerns but okay with the proposal otherwise?) that the Mayor of Hackney has publicly branded as "wholly inappropriate" and called Boris's intervention as "cynical" – Do you agree with Mayor of Hackney about this? Given that Mayor John Biggs draws two allowances as Mayor of Tower Hamlets and local GLA member, has he made a compelling case (please provide examples and links to the contribution or representation) to ensure developers and City Hall do the best for the area rather than be simply driven by profit at the expense of what is good for local residents. Does the Mayor have the sway to hold Boris to account or the courage to stand up for local residents – otherwise what good is part time Mayor Biggs, and his two jobs, are to local people?

8.22 Question from Councillor Suluk Ahmed:

What is the total figure of combined allowances from Mayor Biggs' two jobs – GLA and local Mayor - not withstanding any forgoing of allowances, associated rhetoric and spin - just the total figure from his two jobs? Does he claim any other allowance(s), salary, income-in-kind support/donation or finance except his two jobs? What interests – personal and discloseable pecuniary interests – have been recorded and declared by Mayor Biggs at the GLA and in Council meetings in last three years and since election in Tower Hamlets. Please provide details and breakdown with information to explain the level of interest and involvement.

8.23 Question from Councillor Shah Alam:

Under the new enlightened era of transparency and accountability, what is the Council protocol if a Member or Mayor is publicly hosting an event or a foreign dignitary etc., using Council resources, inviting members of community and other stakeholders, in the Council Chamber or Committee Room – a tax payer funded building and rooms – in terms of inviting other Members, regardless of political affiliation. Should it be extended to all Members or just to certain political groups and parties? Following this, what sanctions or procedures are prescribed in the Code of Conduct, Standards regime or elsewhere if a Member or the Mayor fails to adhere to the guidelines and what should officers be doing to impress this upon members if any such events or meetings are organised by using offices of power and authority by administration where other elected members are deliberately excluded, since no invitation has been extended, from such public meetings/events which are hosted at the council facility?

8.24 Question from Councillor Aminur Khan:

What is the total cost - direct, indirect and associated - in refurbishing and redesigning the first floor as ordered by the part time two-jobs Mayor Biggs after his election in June 2015? Please specify the facts and figures with a breakdown in relation to fixtures, fittings, furniture, material, painting, labour, employee hours, contractors etc. and any other costs that are incurred so far and or are expected?

8.25 Question from Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury:

Sometimes members get complaints about Registered Social Landlords for their poor performance and poor customer care. Does the council have any standard policy to monitor the performance of registered social landlords?