

Mayor's Report to Council 18/11/15

Report of John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets, to Council

This is my third report to Council, maintaining my personal commitment to ensuring that principles of openness and transparency underpin the work of this administration.

In that context, I was particularly pleased to publish my Transparency Protocol following the November Cabinet meeting. This sets out my proposals for ensuring my own accountability to residents and to the Council and my intentions for the way the Executive function of the Council operates. I continue to attend meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny – and to speak when invited. I look forward to receiving the conclusions of the O&S Transparency Commission and will respond, positively I hope, to its recommendations.

I am also hoping very soon to hold my first 'Mayor's Question Time' in the community. I have, of course, attended many meetings in the community already, to listen and be accountable. A 'MQT' will be an event organised by the Council to add to these and to increase opportunities for residents to quiz me, and maybe cabinet members too. I envisage a local Councillor for that part of the Borough would Chair it. The first MQT is work in progress and I intend that by the next Council meeting it will have happened.

Key Events

Chief Executive and Statutory Officers

Will Tuckley joined the Council as Chief Executive on 19th October. Council members and residents can be strongly reassured that the issues of instability in the senior management ranks of the Council are being addressed. For the first time in several years all three of statutory posts that local authorities are required to have in place – Head of Paid Service, (Chief Executive), Section 151 Officer (Corporate Director of Resources) and Monitoring Officer (Corporate Director of Law, Probity and Governance) - are filled by substantive post holders.

Will had the opportunity to meet a significant number of our staff on his first day in post at the second of our Staff Conferences. I also spoke there. I look forward to working closely with him and his management team. I feel a great relief that we have a permanent and substantive Chief Executive. I would like to thank Steve Halsey for his service, in difficult and sometimes impossible circumstances, in holding things together until Will's arrival. I am sure most of you will join me in this.

Commissioners

The appointments to the statutory officer posts were the subject of one of the Directions imposed on the Council under the previous administration by the Government. A number of the Directions have now been discharged. It was pleasing that the Secretary of State has allowed the general direction imposed

(before my election) in May this year to run down. This marks an important milestone in the return to full democratic control of the Council. I now Chair the Best Value Programme Review Board, which again is an important and symbolic staging post as the Council increasingly assumes the control and the direction of its affairs in the areas of the Directions.

There is still much work to do however – on processes, management and political leadership of grants, procurement, asset management, communications and the culture of the Council - before we will wave farewell to the Commissioners. The CEO and I are leading in this work, and I intend to report steady progress to future meetings of the Council. The CEO and I meet with the Commissioners weekly, although this is becoming less frequent as work progresses.

Communications Review

The LGA have concluded their quick review and will be making, I think, some far-reaching and constructive proposals. A significant change to East End Life remains on track, and it will go fortnightly from Christmas, with a saving to the Council. Its finances are however precarious and it will not be a massive saving, particularly when a decline in advertising revenue is factored in.

Civic Centre

There will be discussion elsewhere on this agenda on my decision to agree to the former Royal London Hospital site as the location for the Council's future civic centre. The previous decision on the location had been taken without any public information being provided on the assessment of the other options available and the value for money considerations. Given that this is likely to be the most significant Council investment of the decade, it was vital that this was reassessed. And I was determined that all Party Groups and Councillors have an opportunity to contribute to the decision. I want this inclusiveness to continue and I have asked Dave Chesterton to lead a cross-party reference group to keep a close eye on progress and try to ensure the best and best value outcome.

It doesn't give me any great pleasure to be spending so much of the local people's money on a new Civic Centre, but it was clear that there was little choice and that what was probably a good value decision almost 25 years ago has left us with a big bill now. However, we have I think, a credible funding strategy which should leave us with a better value outcome on the revenue fund. I am satisfied that the time taken for due consideration of these factors has been justified.

Budget preparations We have had a healthy response to our consultation on savings proposals - 435 from residents and 247 from staff on line, for example. These responses are currently being analysed and the information from this consultation will be presented to Members and taken into account as we move to debating and making decisions on the 2016-17 budget in the coming weeks. I am clear that we face some very difficult decisions, not least because of the previous failure, in my view, of the council's leadership to develop a medium term strategy requiring significant and tough decisions, which were generally put off. We may need to consider an increase in Council Tax in order to help manage savings and protect local people.

I am also particularly alarmed by the impact of the Government's Benefit and Welfare Changes, which will severely affect the incomes of many local people. Combined with rent rises, and with council budget pressures making it difficult for us to sustain the growing level of discretionary payments to affected families, we will see a growing number of local residents forced out of our borough. Members should not underestimate the seriousness of this crisis. Getting people into work remains a priority and in January my cabinet member will launch proposals for our programme to improve our performance in this area.

Street Cleansing and Waste

Of all Council services these universal services have a huge impact on how residents perceive the Council. I am pleased that the additional resources I agreed to in July are now being deployed to improve services through Clean Team initiatives, the removal of charges for bulk waste collections and improved monitoring of our waste contracts. This remains an ongoing challenge for the Council and I am taking a close personal interest in ensuring we provide high quality services. I am meeting with senior officers and others weekly to chase progress with complaints and service delivery. I welcome continuing complaints – if the service isn't working, we must get it right. There may be a need for further investment as a part of this year's budget.

London Metropolitan University

I am sure all Members will regret, as I do, the proposal of the London Metropolitan University to close its Aldgate Campus and in particular to move the Sir John Cass Department of Art, Media and Design from its purpose designed location in Aldgate. The Cass, and its predecessor institutions, has been a feature of the East End for decades and the faculty has an unmatched reputation for combining academic study and creative production. The proposal is largely to do with the University's financial need to consolidate its operation on one site in Holloway. I have met urgently with the Vice Chancellor to make clear the impact on our community of this proposal and I will continue to champion the cause of the Aldgate campus.

Development Issues

I was pleased to agree in Cabinet the South Quay Masterplan, which is an important statement of the Council's aspirations for an area where the demand for development is high. Despite Government initiatives that undermine local planning authorities, it is important we assert the need for community benefits from developers. On its own the SQMP will not change policy on the Isle of Dogs. However, the new consultation on a Local Plan for Tower Hamlets, together with work on the OAPF, led by City Hall, and the Local Planning Forum, which I think Cabinet will approve in December, will mean that plenty of attention is given to this issue, which is very important.

I recently met representatives from Sustrans to discuss their proposal for a cycle and pedestrian bridge from Westferry to Surrey Docks, which I think is exciting, particularly if it is funded by others!

We are considering our response to the Silvertown Crossing Proposals. With serious safeguards and mitigation I tend to support this, but I know that there

is a vociferous lobby against, and I will listen to the concerns and try to reach a balanced view. I met, with Cllrs Ayas Miah and Blake and our Chief Executive and other officers, with the Commissioner of Transport For London recently, and we discussed this and other matters, including roadworks on the Mile End Road, at that meeting.

Bishopsgate goodsyard

It was a blow to us and to Hackney that the Mayor of London has chosen to exercise his statutory powers to take over responsibility for dealing with the proposed developments at Bishopsgate and Norton Folgate. I am actively working with Mayor Jules Pipe of Hackney and with community groups in both Boroughs to ensure the views of local people and the affected local authorities are strongly heard in the decision making process. I addressed a public meeting of about 200 people in Shoreditch on Monday on this matter. We have not, I trust, heard the last of it and it would be a serious error for the London Mayor to approve the proposals. I am pleased to report that the public meeting helped to galvanise my resolve on this.

Fire Cuts & Police Cuts Too

I am alarmed that the Mayor of London appears set to cut a further 13 fire appliances in London. This could see Poplar Fire Station and nearby Shoreditch station under threat. I will oppose those cuts. Similarly, the steady reduction in PCSOs and the impending bigger cuts in police budgets mean that our police officer numbers in Tower Hamlets will be under serious threat and we should prepare for and lobby against these cuts too.

Housing

I remain anxious about the performance of One Housing Group, and met recently with the Chair and Chief Executive, where I made clear our unhappiness. I think that a frank exchange may help to improve relations longer term.

Similarly, I am meeting soon with the chairman of Circle. We are concerned about both their local performance and the merger proposals of which we have heard. Mega-landlords are, in our experience, less responsive and sensitive to local needs.

I keep in regular touch with other social landlords, both to discuss their plans and also to ensure that recent decisions on rents and sales are not posing a threat to them.

I am delighted to have met Susmita Sen, the new CEO of THH, and wish her well with making progress in the completion of Decent Homes and in other areas at the ALMO.

Finally, we have agreed a programme that should see over 800 new Council Homes built in the Borough in the next few years. I opened one of the first schemes, at Bradwell Street. This was started under the previous Mayor, to whom thanks. However, the rents on properties we build will be considerably lower as these were charged at 'affordable' levels, which, as we all know, are unaffordable for many local people. My Affordability Commission will in the new year quickly make proposals as to how we better address local needs with the limited resources and powers available to us.

Fireworks

It was great to see thousands of people enjoying the fireworks at Victoria Park – and also to learn that Victoria Park retains its national position as the people's favourite park. Thanks to all the staff involved and to our partners who supported the return of this much loved celebration.

Somaliland Delegation

I was part of the Tower Hamlets party that met distinguished visitors from Somaliland on 16th October and welcome those who have come for this meeting this evening.

Cabinet and Mayoral Decisions

Cabinet has met twice since my last report and considered a number of matters, with decisions published on the Council's website. In addition, Mayoral Decisions have been signed on:

- Bow Bridge CPO- Amendment to Post Titles in Delegation
- Reducing frequency of East End Life to fortnightly
- LBTH/GLA Contract for £13.27m Decent Homes Additional backlog Funding
- Nomination to Tower Hamlets Community Housing
- St Paul's Way Trust School Expansion

Engagement and Meetings

As previously reported to Council I seek to record here my main engagements and meetings as Mayor though, obviously, I cannot record every conversation and encounter within this report.

- 17 September 2015
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
 - Visit – Housing Zone Tour
 - Meeting with GMB Branch Secretary
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Law, Probity & Governance
 - Meeting with Beta Bangla
 - Mayor's Surgery
- 18 September 2015
 - Meeting with London First: Borough Leader Series
 - Meeting with George Kyriacou, Quay House
 - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
 - Meeting with Trade Unions
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Children Services
 - Meeting with Constituents
- 21 September 2015
 - Visit to Community Music – Brady Arts Centre
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development and Renewal
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
- 22 September 2015
 - Visit to Stepney City Farm

- Photo call to Promote Idea Store Learning Brochure – Chrisp Street Idea Store
- Meeting with SOLACE (Council's Cultural Change Consultants)
- Meeting with Corporate Director for Resources
- Visit to Canary Wharf Members Group – Canary Wharf
- 23 September 2015
 - Meeting with Karen Housing Association
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with Constituents
- 24 September 2015
 - Meeting with Service Head of Audit
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
 - Mayor's Surgery
- 25 September 2015
 - Growth Borough Leaders & Mayors
 - Meeting with Service Head for Adult Social Care
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Children Services
 - Meeting with senior representatives of Mulberry Girls School
 - Meeting with THCVS
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Law, Probity & Governance
 - Meeting with Service Head for Adult Social Care
- 28 September 2015
 - Meeting with the Speaker
 - Meeting with Service Head for Culture Learning and Leisure
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Resources
 - Meeting with Network Rail – Chapman Street Arches
- 29 September 2015
 - Meeting with CEO of Tower Hamlets Homes
 - Cabinet/CMT Away day
 - Commissioners & Cabinet
- 30 September 2015
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
 - Meeting with Commissioners
 - Visit to Friendship Club – Launch of Tenants Association
- 1 October 2015
 - Launch of Barlett Waterside Centre & New Housing
 - Mayor's Management Team Meeting
 - Meeting with Tyre World Trading Ltd
 - Mayor's Surgery
 - Meeting with London Muslim Centre – Introduction to Trustees
- 2 October 2015
 - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
 - Briefing for incoming Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Visit to Queen Victoria Seaman's Rest
 - Rainbow Film Society Event
- 3 October 2015

- Attendance at Tower Hamlets SEN & Disabilities Young People's Service Launch
- 5 October 2015
 - Meeting with Jim Fitzpatrick MP
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Resources
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
 - Meeting with Chairman & Chief Officer of Spitalfields Music
 - Meeting with proposed Tower Hamlets Chambers of Commerce
 - LGBT Hero's Award
- 6 October 2015
 - Meeting with Councillor Dave Chesterton
 - Meeting with Fairview Homes
 - Meeting with Constituents
 - Meeting with L&Q Whitechapel Central
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Resources
- 7 October 2015
 - Attendance at Citizenship Ceremony – Bromley Public Hall
 - Attendance at Topping out ceremony – Bow River Village
 - Meeting with Commissioners
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
 - Governance Working Group
- 8 October 2015
 - Meeting with Borough Police Commander
 - Meeting with Service Head for Adult Social Care
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
 - Mayor's Surgery
- 9 October 2015
 - Meeting with Interim Service Head of Public Realm
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with Royal Mint Developers
 - Meeting with Council's Independent Persons
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
- 10 October 2015
 - Attendance at Tower Hamlets Annual Conference for School Governors
 - Attendance at Udichi event
- 12 October 2015
 - Meeting with Service Head for Culture Learning and Leisure
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
 - Meeting with Galliard Homes
 - Attendance at BFA 19th Annual Awards Ceremony 2015
- 13 October 2015
 - Meeting with representatives of TH Sudanese Community
- 14 October 2015
 - Meeting with Interim Service Head of Public Realm
- 15 October 2015
 - Visit to and opening at Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project, including tour of new Poplar Mosque

- JCAG
- Meeting with Dorsett Hospitality International Ltd - Far East Consortium (Developers)
- Meeting with FSB
- Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
- 16 October 2015
 - Meeting with Amy Whitelock Gibbs
 - Meeting with Boyhood to Manhood Foundation
 - Visit to Swanlea School
 - Visit to Town Hall of Somaliland delegation
 - Visit to Phoenix School
 - Attendance at Neighbours in Poplar - Workhouse Team Event
- 19 October 2015
 - Meeting with CEO of Tower Hamlets
 - Meeting with Veolia CEO – Estelle Brachlianoff
 - Staff Conference
- 20 October 2015
 - Meeting with CEO of East End Homes – Paul Bloss
 - Mayor’s Strategic Housing Meeting
 - Visit to Arnhem Wharf Primary School
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Resources
 - Meeting with Rushanara Ali MP
 - Attendance at Sanaton Association Event at York Hall
- 21 October 2015
 - Meeting with Commissioners
 - Best Value Programme Review Board
- 22 October 2015
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Children Services
 - Meeting with Harkness Housing Community Centre
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
 - Meeting with Service Head for Adult Social Care
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Resources
 - Mayor’s Surgery
- 23 October 2015
 - Meeting with Sainsbury’s re Whitechapel Development
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Attendance at Raising of the Green Flag – Altab Ali Park
 - Meeting with Greenland Infinite (Herstmere House)
 - Meeting with GLL – Mark Sesnan
- 25 October 2015
 - Attendance at Culloden Parents Centre – Eid Event
 - Attendance at THLP BAME AGM
- 26 October 2015
 - Meeting with CEO of Tower Hamlets Community Housing
 - Meeting with constituents
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
- 27 October 2015
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Mayor’s Management Team Meeting

- London Chamber of Commerce – Business Leaders
 - LLDC Board Meeting
 - MAB
 - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
- 28 October 2015
 - Meeting with Councillor David Edgar
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
 - Meeting with Stepney FC re Haileybury Youth Centre
 - Meeting with Commissioners
- 29 October 2015
 - Photo call – Protest against the Jack the Ripper Museum
 - Meeting with Christ Church Spitalfields
 - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
 - Meeting with Constituents
 - Attendance at People’s Choice Award Event (Victoria Park)
 - Mayor’s Surgery
- 30 October 2015
 - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
 - Meeting with Councillor Oliur Rahman
 - Meeting with Sustrans re proposed Thames Bridge
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with CEO of Tower Hamlets
 - Photo call – Launch of Street Cleansing Team ‘Clean Team’
 - Attendance at Somali Week Festival – Oxford House
- 31 October 2015
 - Stepney City Farm Ecopod Launch. Opened the Ecopod
 - Attendance at Arbour Youth
- 2 November 2015
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Service Head for Adult Social Care
 - Meeting with CEO of Poplar HARCA – Steve Stride
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Law, Probity & Governance
 - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
 - Meeting with Collective of Bangladesh School Governors
 - Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 3 November 2015
 - Meeting with Ballymore Group
 - Meeting with Linden Homes
 - Whitechapel Delivery 5th Strategic Partnership Board Meeting
 - Meeting with Mark Palmer-Edgecumbe - Jack the Ripper Museum
 - Cabinet
 - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
- 4 November 2015
 - Meeting with Professor Raftery – London Metropolitan University
 - Visit to SmartCarz, and opening of new shop at Watney Market
 - Meeting with Constituents
 - Attendance at Limehouse Welfare Association: Children's Performance & Achievement Annual Award Ceremony 2015
- 5 November 2015

- Visit to Goodmans Fields (Berkeley Homes development)
- Meeting with Films of Record – re possible TV programme
- Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
- LGA Communications Review
- Meeting with Blocker Bus Campaign
- Mayor's Surgery
- Attendance at Bangladeshi Who's Who 2015 – Publication Launch & Gala Dinner
- 6 November 2015
 - Meeting with constituent
 - Meeting with Councillor Shiria Khatun
 - Opening of New Community Project in Limehouse
 - Meeting with Essential Living
 - Attendance at Special Awards Event for GCSE, A Levels
- 7 November 2015
 - Attendance at Community Day/Opening of Bradwell Street
 - Attendance at Firework Display
- 8 November 2015
 - Remembrance Service – Tower Hill
- 9 November 2015
 - Meeting with CEO of British Land – Nigel Webb
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Service Head for Corporate Strategy & Equality
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
 - Meeting with Bethnal Green Academy
 - Attendance at JMG Cargo & Travel 13th Anniversary & Awards Ceremony 2015
- 10 November 2015
 - Visit to Dorsett Community Centre
 - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
 - Attendance at Diwali celebration
- 11 November 2015
 - A Partnership of Schools for Tower Hamlets – Consultation
 - Meeting with Constituents
 - Meeting with TfL Commissioner
 - Meeting with Spitalfields Housing Association CEO & Chair
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
 - Meeting with Commissioners
 - Public Meeting with Telco Leaders & members
- 12 November 2015
 - Meeting with Chairman of One Housing, Anthony Mayer, and CEO, Mick Sweeney
 - Meeting with Barratt London
 - Meeting with Mencap Society/Gateway Club
 - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
 - Meeting with Lovebox
 - Mayor's Surgery
 - Supper event at Queen Mary University of London
 - Meeting with constituent re Somali community issues

- 13 November 2015
 - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
 - National Meals on Wheels Week
 - Meeting with East End Community Foundation
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with SOLACE (Council Cultural Change consultants)
 - Attendance at THMSF Charity Gala Dinner
- 14 November 2015
 - Attendance at Collingwood Estate TRA AGM
- 16 November 2015
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC & visit to CCTV room
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for D&R
 - Meeting with Corporate Director for Childrens Services
 - Attended and spoke at public meeting re Bishopsgate Goods Yard
 - Met with Chair of O&S
- 17 November 2015
 - Meeting with Service Head Human Resources
 - Met developer re Wapping Power Station Hotel proposal
 - Meeting with Tower Hamlets Carers Association
 - Meeting with BFA
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Procurement Workshop
 - Birkbeck College Governors
 - Meeting with Cllr Rachael Saunders
 - Meeting with Spitalfields HA Board Members
- 18 November 2015
 - Best Value Programme Board
 - Meeting with 'Somaliland' ministers
 - This Council Meeting

