

# Mayor's Report to Council 20/1/2016

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

This is my fourth written report to Council. This has again been a busy period, with meetings and activities concerning all areas of the Council's work, but this time with a particular focus on the budget.

I have now attended the O&S committee four times, and they keep inviting me. I am holding my first 'Mayor's Assembly' in the community, at Whitechapel, on 21<sup>st</sup> January. I have, of course, attended many meetings in the community already, to listen and be accountable, but a Mayor's Assembly is the first attempt to do this in a more organised open access format. The meeting is an innovation and I will review how it works. I want also to offer members the opportunity of Ward based meetings, chaired by themselves, where I can meet their constituents.

Happy new year!

## Key Events

**Budget** The Council is about to consider my first budget and will properly debate it under the processes set out in statute. I will only raise at this point that the budget-making has highlighted a failure of strategic planning under the previous regime, where too often savings were made without thinking about the future shape of the authority. This is necessary. After the budget is agreed, in whatever form, a further and continuing programme of work will be needed throughout 2016. This will require a detailed look at the structure and organisation of the Council, in order to ensure that several years of 'salami-slicing' are examined and the structure is fit for purpose. Rebuilding a solid budget foundation, with clear priorities and possibly some tough decisions is a part of moving on from past controversy and lack of focus.

**Chief Executive, and further appointments** Will Tuckley has been in post for about three months. I am pleased we are tackling major issues facing the Council and, while always impatient, I am looking forward to more detailed proposals to take us beyond the 'Best Value' regime agreed with our Commissioners and towards a more corporate and focused authority. I am sure that with this we can better meet local needs, and respond to budget pressures. We are currently recruiting Directors of Adults and Childrens Services, together with a number of Service Heads. Prolonged acting appointments are not wise, and so this will be another necessary step forwards.

**Commissioners** Progress is being made with our Directions. I recently agreed the final dates for East End Life. The initial Communications Review is complete but we now need to build the alternative communications strategy, which will happen in the next few months. Suggestions that the closure of East End Life will 'save' £1.5million are wide of the mark. This doesn't reflect

the net cost to the Council of producing East End Life and, as we move forward, the Council will still need to communicate and advertise, as it always has, albeit through new channels. It would be good to see a saving in the budget but it is too early to say if this will happen.

On the other remaining directions, Procurement and Asset Management are on course. The latter will require among other things a more systematic approach to community buildings, which have historically been rented under apparently ad hoc, inconsistent and poorly justified decisions. Thus, identical organisations providing community value in similar buildings might enjoy widely different rent and security of tenure.

The two more complex remaining Directions are Grants and Organisational Culture. I can report steady progress with these, and the publication of a draft Voluntary and Community Sector strategy is welcome and is part of the Grants process.

**Street Cleansing and Waste** There has been a reduction in complaints about the waste contracts and cleansing. I think this is in part due to the increased management focus on this matter. Additionally, some new money has been invested in the street cleansing service and more is proposed.

Meanwhile, we are beginning to consider the re-provision of the cleansing service, with the current contracts ending in 2019. Getting this right, while managing costs and improving outcomes, will be a challenge and will be brought forward for scrutiny and examination soon.

**Youth Service:** New interim management has been recruited for the Youth Service, with a parallel exercise to review and as necessary redesign the service. This will be reported and open to scrutiny in the coming months. As a part of this change, the Youth Service will soon be transferred (back) to Childrens Services, from where it was transferred to the CLC Directorate, together with a transfer 'in-house' of most provision, a few years ago. In my view this was not a change that succeeded.

**Development Issues** The pressure for development, including high density and high rise schemes continues. There are five matters I can report:

- i. Our Borough Our Plan: consultation has now started on a new Local Plan. At this stage the consultation is on the scope of questions we want to examine. A far longer consultation will happen when a draft plan is published, hopefully later in 2016. This is a very important piece of work and I want our community to have the opportunity for detailed consideration of and contribution to the proposals.
- ii. The application 'called in' by the Mayor of London at Blossom Street/Norton Folgate was determined by the Mayor the other day, with permission given, contrary to the views of many local residents.
- iii. Bishopsgate Goods Yard: The Mayor of London called this scheme in and is proposing to consider it in March. I remain very opposed to the proposed development and we are talking with Hackney about how best to make our case against it.

- iv. The Whitechapel Masterplan is proceeding but is being quickly reviewed, to see how comfortable we are with the overall proposals including densities and heights of buildings. We remain committed to the Masterplan and regeneration of the area but local interests must be protected.
- v. Isle of Dogs 'OAPF': A briefing was given to members about this 'opportunity area framework' proposed by City Hall. While there is potential for development at the Northern end of the Island, I remain anxious that the London Mayor is getting carried away with himself in proposing unsustainable development, including the possible regeneration of the Poplar High Street area. Any such proposal needs to be considered sensitively, slowly and with local people.
- vi. Community Planning Forums: At Cabinet I recently agreed the new local planning forum for Limehouse. Other proposals for the Isle of Dogs and for Spitalfields have been delayed while I consider a number of objections and concerns, and questions about their boundaries and status (the inclusion of business interests in the forum in particular). However, I remain committed to the proposals in principle.

**Planning Contributions Transparency:** As an important part of my transparency agenda I agreed that 'Section 106' and 'Community Infrastructure Levy' spending proposals will be considered openly and therefore will be subject to scrutiny. This will be through, effectively, a sub-committee of the Cabinet. This is a contrast to the past where such decisions were made, without serious opportunity for challenge, by a secretive Officers Panel and then 'rubber stamped'. The level of such contributions, together with the urgent need for infrastructure investment to run alongside our scale of development, means that openness is a long overdue development.

**Housing** There are a number of developments.

- i. The Affordability Commission: my commission has now met twice. It faces some challenging decisions but will, I hope, improve our ability to both meet local needs and campaign effectively for unmet needs, as unaffordability and lack of supply continues to hammer us and many local people.
- ii. One Housing Group. There have been a number of meetings with One Housing Group, myself, cabinet members, local Councillors and residents since my election. I have made it clear that the approach of OHG to date has not been acceptable and that residents must be consulted in a thoughtful and open manner about any development proposals. A 'residents' friend' is to be appointed. The Council, during this period, passed a resolution and I report below on outcomes.
- iii. Circle Group: I remain concerned about the performance of Circle. While their repairs service has markedly improved, their impending merger with Affinity Sutton is, I and others think, a further departure from the local accountability and responsiveness residents expected on both the HAT exit and stock transfer. A motion was passed by Council some months ago and an update is reported below

**Report Back on Council Motions** Below are responses on progress following two recent motions passed by the Council with recommendations to the Executive. Both concern Housing Association Matters:

### **Circle Old Ford**

In January 2015 Full Council passed a motion regarding concerns relating to the alleged poor management and performance residents of Circle Old Ford were receiving.

A number of high level meetings have been held with Circle to try and resolve these issues. A public meeting was held where Circle's Chief Executive and other senior staff recognised that there had been serious problems with the quality of services residents had received and apologised to residents. It was also explained that a new repairs and maintenance contractor was now in place and performance should improve.

The motion also called on the Council to explore options for legal proceedings for breach of promises contained in the transfer agreement. The Council has not received any evidence or details of which promises were allegedly breached and as such cannot address this with Circle in the absence of this.

### **One Housing Group**

Another Motion was received by Full Council in July 2015 regarding a number of issues relating to One Housing.

I wrote to One Housing's Chief Executive outlining the Council's concerns relating to allegations of serious detriment residents had experienced as a result of the failings of their repairs and maintenance service. Added to this residents perceive that One Housing Group has been dishonest with them over its plans to redevelop the Island Estates.

Following meetings with officers from OHG and the Chair of their Board I instructed Officers to suspend One Housing as a preferred partner for 6 months.

The Council's legal team are looking at the transfer agreement to determine whether One Housing Group would be breaching any conditions particularly relating to redevelopment of the estate.

### **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:

- Substance Misuse Contracts Extension
- Appointments to London Housing Consortium (LHC)
- Appointments to External Bodies
- Best Value Plan for Communications
- Nominations for Tower Hamlets Community Housing
- Tower Hamlets Housing Board Governance
- Police Partnership Task Force Programme

## **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.

### **Engagement & Meetings – 16 November 2015 – 17 January 2016**

- 16 November 2015
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
  - ITV Interview re. Bishopsgate Goodyards
  - Meeting with Director for Law, Probity & Governance
  - Meeting with Interim Corporate Director for Children Services
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake & TH Officers re. Pay & Stay Consultation
  - Attendance at London Live Interview on Shoreditch High Street, E1
  - Attendance at Mayoral Debate – Bishopsgate Goodsyard on Shoreditch High Street
- 17 November 2015
  - Meeting with Service Head for Human Resources
  - Meeting with Kurt Bredenbeck & Quest re: Wapping Hydraulic Power Station
  - Meeting with Tower Hamlets Carers Association
  - Meeting with Bangladeshi Football Association
  - Meeting with Chief Executive
  - Procurement Workshop
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
- 18 November 2015
  - Meeting with Councillor David Edgar & TH Officers re. Budget
  - Best Value Programme Review Board
  - Full Council
- 19 November 2015
  - Video Message for Rainbow Film Society
  - Meeting with Glengall Quay
  - Meeting with Director for Law, Probity & Governance
  - Mayor's Surgery
  - Attendance at Whitechapel Business & Traders Association
- 20 November 2015
  - Meeting with Councillor Shiria Khatun
  - Children's Commissioner Takeover Day 2015 – Local Cadet shadowing the Mayor
  - Meeting with Constituents
  - Meeting with Chief Executive of East Thames Homes
  - Meeting with Waltham Forest Council - Councillor Clare Coghill
  - Meeting with TH Officers re. Crossrail on Whitechapel
- 23 November 2015
  - Meeting with Communications Staff
  - Meeting with Director for Law, Probity & Governance

- Meeting with Tower Hamlets College Principal & Vice Principal
  - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
- 24 November 2015
  - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
  - Meeting with Councillor Joshua Peck
  - Meeting with Libyan Mayors
  - Barratt London St Andrew's Film Interview
  - Safeguarding Children Workshop
  - Attendance at Tarling West TRA General Meeting
- 25 November 2015
  - Photo Opp: Road Safety Week
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for Resources
  - Meet the Mayor event – Wapping
- 26 November 2015
  - Meeting with Langdon Park Students
  - Meeting with GMB Branch Secretary
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
  - Meeting with Eric Pickles
  - Mayor's Surgery
- 27 November 2015
  - Growth Boroughs Leaders & Mayors
  - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
  - Meeting with City Gateway
  - Meeting with Chief Executive
  - Meeting with Spire – Jon Shapiro
  - Meeting with Chief Executive of Poplar HARCA
- 30 November 2015
  - Meeting with Service Head for Corporate Strategy & Equality
  - Meeting with Councillor Peter Golds
  - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
  - Meeting with Service Head for Corporate Property & Capital Delivery
  - Meeting with Regal Homes
  - Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 1 December 2015
  - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
  - Meeting with Councillor Joshua Peck
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake & TH Officers
  - Meeting with Chief Executive
  - Meeting with Corporate Director of Resources
  - Cabinet
  - Cabinet Workshop
- 2 December 2015
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
  - Attendance at Columbia Road Christmas Tree Lighting
  - Attendance at Samuda AGM
- 3 December 2015
  - Meeting with Newham Borough Council – Councillor Unmesh Desai
  - Meeting with Constituents

- Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam & TH Officers
- Attendance at Tower Project - World Disability Day at Ecology Pavilion
- Visit to Mowlem Primary School
- Mayor's Surgery
- 4 December 2015
  - Visit to St Saviour's CE Primary School
  - Meeting with Councillor Shiria Khatun
  - Visit to Tower Hamlets College
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
  - Housing Zone Delivery Board
- 5 December 2015
  - Attendance at Small Business Saturday
- 6 December 2015
  - Attendance at Jagannathpur Upozila Unnayan Songstha UK – Annual Awards Ceremony
- 7 December 2015
  - Meeting with Jim Fitzpatrick MP
  - Meeting with Three Mills Studio
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
  - Meeting with Councillor Ayas Miah
  - Meeting about proposed closure of Cass Faculty, London Metropolitan University
  - Governance Review Working Group
- 8 December 2015
  - Attendance at Leaders Committee
  - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
  - Meeting with Service Head for Adult Social Care
- 9 December 2015
  - Attendance at DLR Glass Bridge Exhibition
  - Meeting with Service Head for Human Resources
  - Meeting with Chief Executive
  - Meeting with Councillor David Edgar & TH Officers
- 10 December 2015
  - Interview with the Guardian
  - Attendance at Local London: Leaders, Mayors & Chief Executive Strategy Group
  - Attendance at Topping Out Ceremony – Barratt London
  - Meeting with Circle Housing Director of Development – Philip Browne re. The London Chest Hospital
  - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
  - Meeting with Ashaadibi Education & Cultural Centre
  - Mayor's Surgery
- 11 December 2015
  - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
  - Meeting with Interim Corporate Director for Children Services
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for CLC
  - Attendance at United East End – Show of Solidarity Rally
  - Meeting with Constituents
  - Attendance at Re-Launch of Locksley Community Centre

- 12 December 2015
  - Attendance at THAMES Saturday Music Centre At St Pauls Way Trust School
- 14 December 2015
  - Visit to Royal Mail Delivery Office
  - Meeting with Service Head for Corporate Strategy & Equality
  - Meeting with Councillor Sirajul Islam
  - Meeting with Sanaton Association
  - London Live Interview
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
- 15 December 2015
  - Meeting with Councillor Dave Chesterton
  - Meeting with Chief Executive
  - Meeting with Chairman of Circle Housing Association
  - Meeting with Director for Law, Probity & Governance
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
  - Mental Health Challenge training session
- 16 December 2015
  - Best Value Programme Review Board
  - Housing Affordability Commission
  - Development Committee
  - Attendance at Channel S Anniversary Celebration 2015 & Victory Day of Bangladesh
- 18 December 2015
  - Meeting with Network Rail & THH re. Chapman Street
  - Dissertation Interview
  - Meeting with Service Head of Human Resource
  - Mayor's Surgery
- 21 December 2015
  - Meeting with Constituents
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
  - Meeting with Constituents
  - Meeting with Councillor Amina Ali
  - Solace Event
- 22 December 2015
  - Meeting with Chief Executive of Genesis Housing Association
  - Meeting with Somali Senior Citizens Club
  - Meeting with Docklands Victims Association
  - Meeting with Director for Law, Probity & Governance
  - Attendance at Anchor Silk Court Care Home Christmas Party
  - Meeting with Councillor David Edgar
  - Visit to Hifzul Qu'ran & Islamic Education Centre
  - Attendance: The Sudanese Community in Tower Hamlets
- 23 December 2015
  - Meeting with Interim Corporate Director for Children Services
  - Meeting with Service Head of Planning & Building Control
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for Resources
- 24 December 2015
  - Meeting with Director for Law, Probity & Governance



- 4 January 2016
  - Meeting with Councillor Dave Chesterton
  - Meeting with Service Manager – Strategy Policy & Performance
  - Meeting with Osmani Centre
  - Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 5 January 2016
  - Meeting with Councillor David Edgar
  - Meeting with Service Head of Community Service
  - Meeting with Director for Law, Probity & Governance
  - Meeting with Councillor Joshua Peck
  - Cabinet
- 6 January 2016
  - Meeting with Constituents
  - Meeting with Service Head for Corporate Property & Capital Delivery
  - Meeting with Constituents
  - Meeting with Director for Law, Probity & Governance
  - Meeting with Chief Executive
  - All Member Seminar
- 7 January 2016
  - Mayor's Surgery
- 8 January 2016
  - Meeting with Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
  - Meeting with Interim Director of Public Health
  - Meeting with Councillor Shiria Khatun
  - Meeting with Councillor Asma Begum
  - Meeting with Head of Strategy Regeneration & Sustainability
  - Meeting with Service Manager – Strategy Policy & Performance
  - Meeting with Service Head of Community Service
  - Meeting with Chief Executive
- 9 January 2016
  - Attendance at Wapping Bangladesh Association
- 10 January 2016
  - Attendance at 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Betar Bangla
- 11 January 2016
  - Launch of RP Grant Scheme
  - Meeting with Corporate Director for Development & Renewal
  - Meeting with Head of Parking Mobility & Transport
  - Meeting with Chief Executive
  - Meeting with Councillor Rachael Saunders
  - Parking Workshop
- 12 January 2016
  - Meeting with Service Head of Children's & Adults Services
  - Meeting with Ayasofia Primary School
  - Meeting with Commissioners
  - Health & Wellbeing Board Meeting
  - Attendance at Lansbury Mosque
- 13 January 2016
  - Meeting with The Licensed Taxi Drivers Association

- Photo Opp: John Orwell Sports Centre Astro-Turf Soft Launch
- Meeting with Councillor David Edgar
- Meeting with Bangladesh Youth Movement
- Meeting with Speaker of Tower Hamlets
- 14 January 2016
  - Interview with The Wharf
  - LGA Interview
  - Meeting with Tower Project
  - Channel S Interview
  - Meeting with Service Head of Planning & Building Control
  - Meeting with Chief Executive
  - Mayor's Surgery
  - Attendance at The London Government Dinner
- 15 January 2016
  - ITV & BBC TV and BBC Radio Interviews re. Housing Amnesty Campaign
  - Meeting with Chief Executive of IJM Royal Mint Development
  - Meeting with Councillor Oliur Rahman
  - Meeting with Councillor Peter Golds
  - JCAG – Safer Communities review
  - Meeting with Councillor Amina Ali
  - Meeting with Chief Executive of Poplar HARCA