

Mayor's Report to Council 18th January 2017

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Happy New Year, and I hope you all had a restful break. For some a little less restful - another of our Councillors, Amy Whitelock Gibbs, has become a parent for the first time, for which congratulations to her and Carlo, and to young Felix too.

This meeting comes quite soon after the last one, and following the break, so this report is shorter than usual. The next few weeks will be taken up with the budget though, so it's an opportunity to catch up on other issues.

Key Events/Announcements

Priorities for 2017: The Strategic Plan is being refreshed for 17/18.

Alongside this I have written to our Chief Executive, outlining particular priorities for the coming year. A copy of this letter is attached to this report. The key theme is that although we are continuing with rebuilding the Council's organisation and performance, we need to accelerate our change with a number of priorities that will focus on the future.

Organisation structure: Our organisation review has now been concluded and confirmed and the new structures established. In the next few months we will be recruiting to fill vacancies. I am pleased that Graham White has, as an interim, been appointed as Monitoring Officer and Director of Governance.

Budget : As stated the next Council meeting will be dominated by our annual budget deliberations. The draft budget is published and I think it achieves painful budget savings while protecting services. There are however some tough choices – you cannot save £1 in every £6 you currently spend without this. I remain open to discussion in the coming few weeks.

CTRS: A key purpose of tonight's meeting is the agreement of next year's position on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. This has been considered at Cabinet and I am proposing a scheme in which those on very low household incomes will continue to receive 100% exemption, with no 'minimum payments'. With the intensity of poverty in our borough I and my colleagues on the Labour side believe it is the right policy.

Commissioners: This week I received a letter from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government confirming progress with removing our directions. The direction on procurement has been lifted, and, with continuing oversight, we have regained our power to make Grant payments, which for almost two years were being made by Commissioners themselves. The making of Grants was one of the most controversial matters under my predecessor and the process of regaining the powers has been slow and frustrating but I think we can proceed with confidence now.

It is still to be hoped that the Commissioners will go at the end of March but we anticipate that there will be some continuing relationship between ourselves and the Government after this. I still need to meet the Secretary of State to discuss this further. The conduct of members, including failure of recognition by some members that it has been a problem, remains, in my view, a residual concern. As regards historic complaints, the 'Clear Up Team' deadline passed and just under 70 complaints were received. These are now

being processed, at arm's length from the Council, by an independently led team.

Youth Services: The reorganisation of youth services was agreed in principle at the January Cabinet. There will now be further consultation during the early part of this year. I anticipate that youth services will be provided from about 25 venues across the borough, but that these will be targeted to achieve better 'outputs' and, crucially for young people, outcomes than in the recent past. I want, however, to emphasise that I have great respect for our committed band of serving youth workers.

Osmani School/School places: I made a clear statement opposing the announcement, without consultation, that Osmani Primary School would change its name to Vallance. I think this is an unwise decision, and will be viewed by many as disrespectful to the experiences and history of the Bangladeshi community. And of course General Osmani was a distinguished British soldier, prior to independence. I think the name of the school is not the determining factor of its character, but it is a significant symbol of our diverse and rich history.

The change is at least partly motivated by concerns about falling school rolls in the West of our Borough. This is a quite significant problem. School demand is quite unpredictable at the present, and is further affected by the arrival, unplanned, of Free Schools in the borough. As an example, a new primary school is arriving soon in Whitechapel (and a secondary too) for which there is no real local need.

I have been holding discussions, as have our officers and my cabinet member, about how we can better manage this process, which includes the planned further arrival of two new secondary schools, one on the Island, the other in Wapping. Do we need them? When do we need them? And what form should they take?

Waste, featuring Pink Sacks: I regret the mess we have got into with the distribution and availability of pink sacks for recyclable waste. I have instructed that their distribution from Libraries and Idea Stores resume on Wednesdays and Saturdays, with effect from next week. In addition, street properties should receive direct delivery.

The recycling service needs to improve, with higher percentages achieved, and less contaminated waste, for which we are penalised, collected. I am clear that pink sacks are a bit of a red herring in this, as we need to redesign the service. I have instructed that early and more thorough progress is made with this and will announce some further changes soon.

Government proposals to require ID at elections: Following the Pickles Review, Government has made it clear that Tower Hamlets voters will be expected to produce identification documents at future elections. I remain sceptical about this proposal but it looks as if it will happen. We are both awaiting guidance but also thinking about how this might be done. At its root, this is a matter for our Returning Officer and not the Executive Mayor, but it may both have resource implications and also, perhaps, offer other opportunities if it is to happen.

ASB review progressing: A review of our anti-social behaviour policies is taking place, and I look forward to making a comprehensive announcement in the near future about how our range of initiatives, and partnership working, can be better coordinated and managed. This work is an important priority for the coming months and year.

Cabinet and Mayoral Decisions: Cabinet has met once 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:

- New Grants Procedure
- Microsoft Enterprise License
- Shop Leases for Ben Johnson Road

Engagements and Meetings: 6 December 2016 – 18 January 2017

- 6 December 2016
 - Interview with Young Fabians Magazine
 - London Councils Leaders Committee
 - Introduction to new apprentices
 - Meeting with Cllr Shiria Khatun
 - Violence against Women and Girls pledge signing
 - Cabinet
- 7 December 2016
 - Housing Event
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Best Value Board pre-meet
 - 150th Anniversary of Central Foundation Boys and Girls School
 - Speakers Charity Ball
- 8 December 2016
 - Meeting with THH Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Cllr Asma begum
 - Meeting with Director, Adult Services
 - Channel S Interview
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Children's Services
 - Mayor's Surgery
 - Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 9 December 2016
 - Local Plan Workshops briefing meeting
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Resources
 - Meeting with Constituent
 - Meeting with Commissioners
 - Dashghar Union Progoti Trust UK Ceremony
 - Tower Hamlets Cricket Club and London Tigers Cricket Awards Evening
- 12 December 2016
 - Meeting with Cllr John Pierce
 - Meeting with Officers re. Victoria Park Lido
 - Meeting between LBTH and City of London
 - Meeting with Lord Nash
 - Meeting with Chief Executive

- Site Tour with Mount Anvil with Chief Executive
- 13 December 2016
 - Constituents meeting re Watts Street and Spirit Street
 - Meeting with Service Head, Corporate Strategy
 - Cabinet/CMT Budget session
 - Mayoral Assembly
- 14 December 2016
 - Meeting with Officers re. ASB
 - Planning Meeting
 - Meeting with Chisenhale Art Place
 - Meeting with officers re. Parking
 - OAPF Strategic Partnership Board Meeting
 - ICON College Best Achiever Awards Party
- 15 December 2016
 - Meeting with Cllr Oliur Rahman (did he come?)
 - Isle of Dogs Working Group
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with International Forum for Secular Bangladesh
 - Site Visit to Harriot House
 - Visit to Whitechapel Gallery
 - Mayor's Surgery
- 19 December 2016
 - Youth Engagement Project meeting
 - Meeting with Centre for London
 - Visit to Foodbank
 - Briefing meeting with Canary Wharf
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Development and Renewal
 - Meeting with Cllr Ayas Miah
 - Meeting with Service Head, Public Realm
- 20 December 2016
 - Meeting with NAFAS
 - Meeting with Commissioners
 - Meeting with Sir Ken Knight
 - Meeting with Officers re. Early Years Children's Centres
 - Meeting with Cllr Shiria Khatun
 - Meeting with Swan Housing Association
 - Meeting with Old Ford Housing Association
 - Somali Task Force Update Meeting
 - Meeting with Somali Community representatives
- 21 December 2016
 - Meeting with Cllr Rachel Blake
 - Meeting with residents re. Branch Road Proposals
 - Meeting with Director, Adult Services
 - Meeting between LBTH and Poplar Harca
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Citizens UK
 - Meeting with Somali Community representatives
- 22 December 2016
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Children's Services
 - Meeting with Genesis Housing Association

- Meeting with Police and LMC & others re. Safe and Secure
 - Home visit
 - Meeting with Cllr Oliur Rahman
 - Meeting with Cllr Ayas Miah
- 23 December 2016
 - Visit to Lansbury Mosque
- 4 January 2017
 - Meeting with constituent
 - Mansard Roof discussion
 - Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 5 January 2017
 - Meeting with Cllr Asma Begum
 - Meeting with Service Head, Corporate Strategy
 - Meeting with officers re. Roman Road Neighbourhood
 - Meeting with Service Head Education and Partnership
 - Mayor's Surgery
- 6 January 2017
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Resources
 - Interview with The Times
 - Meeting with Unmesh Desai AM
- 9 January 2017
 - Stepney Area highways Consultation briefing meeting
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Development and Renewal
 - Floorwalking with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with residents re. Killick Way
- 10 January 2017
 - Meeting with Sir Michael Bear
 - Meeting with Service Head, Communications
 - Meeting with officers re: recycling bags
 - Meeting with Cllr Sirajul Islam
 - Meeting with Cllr Rachael Saunders
 - Cabinet
- 11 January 2017
 - Meeting with Officers re. ASB
 - Interviews for Interim Monitoring Officer post
- 12 January 2017
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Floor walk with Chief Executive
 - Meeting with Cllr Rachel Blake
 - Muslim Aid Soup Kitchen
 - Swanlea Schools Mental Health Awareness Launch
 - Mayor's Surgery
 - Public Meeting – London Chest Hospital Development Plans
- 16 January 2017
 - Meeting with Len Duvall
 - Meeting with Cllr Shiria Khatun
 - Meeting with the New Providence Wharf Hotel
 - Meeting with Corporate Director, Development and Renewal
 - Meeting with Chief Executive
 - Floorwalk with the Chief Executive

- Meeting with Cllr Ayas Miah
 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 17 January 2017
 - Cabinet/CMT Budget session
 - Press Briefing
 - Meeting with Director, Adult Services
 - Best Value Board Pre-meet
 - Grants Determination (Cabinet) sub-committee
 - Constitutional Working Party
- 18 January 2017
 - Meeting with constituent
 - Meeting with Service Head, HR and WD
 - Council Meeting