

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL**

**APPENDIX A**

**6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

Questions not put at the meeting are listed on the attached document, along with response of the Mayor or Lead Member.

**8. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

Questions not put at the meeting are listed on the attached document, along with response of the Mayor or Lead Member.

This page is intentionally left blank

## APPENDIX A – WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS THAT WERE NOT PUT AT THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING (22 March 2017)

### Question 8.8 Question from Councillor Ohid Ahmed

Will the Mayor provide official crime rate figures (overall) for each year since 2010 until present (2017) for the Borough? And will the Mayor confirm that Anti-Social Behaviour is a priority for him which is backed up by his utmost focus and required leadership?

### Response from Councillor Shiria Khatun, Cabinet Member for Community Safety:

Whilst I provided a verbal response to Councillor Ahmed's question at the meeting, I referred to official crime rates, which I include here for completeness:

#### Official crime rates since 2010

##### *Actual figures:*

- 2009/10 – 26,989
- 2010/11 – 28,668
- 2011/12 – 29,463
- 2012/13 – 29,082
- 2013/14 – 27,139
- 2014/15 – 27,348
- 2015/16 – 28,752
- 2016/17 (10 months up to and including January 2017) – 26,005.

### 8.12 Question from Councillor Abdul Asad

Has the Mayor met with the petitioners following the Budget Meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> February to discuss with them their concerns and how the council could work with them to address the issues they highlighted related to children's centres, nurseries and young people's services?

### Response from Councillor Rachael Saunders

I have held a series of meetings with a wide range of parents, carers, and providers, including petitioners who came to the Budget meeting in February.

Meetings have taken place with petitioners regarding children's centres, nurseries, and young people's services and we share a lot of their concerns.

However the people we have met have also understood the difficult position the council is in. We have no choice but to save £58m from our budget due to Tory cuts and the cost of dealing with the chaos we inherited from the previous Mayor.

Despite those cuts we will still have one of the best funded early years services in London, and we are keeping all of our children's centres open – and as we have already heard tonight, are investing in new facilities.

I'm also pleased that the Mayor also agreed to release some further funding from reserves to address gaps in the new service.

### **8.13 Question from Councillor John Pierce**

Can the Mayor update us on the Council's progress to meet the second goal of the OSC Transparency Commission to 'publish all data by default wherever possible'?

### **Response from Councillor David Edgar**

The Council is currently at a Level 3 publication level. Publication of details of spending over £500 is ahead of the requirements of the Transparency Code with January 2017 already published.

The new Socrata software is in the course of development and when it becomes operational which is anticipated for June 2017 the Council will move to Level 4. This will allow residents and other users to look at and use the data in a variety of different ways and cross reference data.

Work is in progress to publish expenditure from £250 and all payment card expenditure via the Socrata software.

### **8.14 Question from Councillor Mahbub Alam**

How would the Mayor describe Poplar HARCA's relationship with the Council and the Mayor, as well as its performance?

### **Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam**

I personally feel that, as an organisation created in 1996 from a stock transfer of Council housing, the Harca should be a lot closer to and influenced by the Council than an historically separate body would be - but the fact is it is a completely legally separate organisation from the council.

As such, they have developed a way of working which includes the sharing of information, but a more limited spirit of partnership than we might have hoped. I think this position largely developed under the previous Mayor when council nominees to the Harca board were removed, partly because of the disengagement of the previous administration's nominees.

Whilst we do share a common allocations system, and have collaborated on a number of regeneration projects, we were not happy with their position, for example, on parking charges and on sales of empty properties. The Mayor very assertively makes these points, as do officers, with the HARCA.

Our duty to residents in Harca properties means we of course need to maintain a working relationship with them but we will continue to stand up for residents and to raise issues when we disagree with them.

#### **8.15 Question from Councillor M. Abdul Mukit:**

Tower Hamlets has a successful night-time economy which has major benefits but also needs careful management. What is the Lead Member doing to tackle drug abuse and the associated anti-social behaviour?

#### **Response from Councillor Shiria Khatun**

It is important that we make the Borough a safe place for both our residents and visitors to the area. But we are also proud to have a strong and successful night time economy that attracts investment and jobs to our borough and provides a range of entertainment opportunities, including bars, restaurants, cinemas, and clubs.

Having a successful night time economy does however, bring other challenges, including managing bad behaviour.

The Council are currently reviewing all of our services that are associated with tackling anti-social behaviour, and it is a priority to ensure that those enjoying our night time economy do so in a welcoming environment.

The Council is also introducing a Late Night Levy, in effect from 1 June 2017, which will raise additional money to be used in the reduction of crime and disorder, promotion of public safety, reduction or prevention of public nuisance, and cleaning of highways or land in the borough.

The Council will continue to work with our partners, from a wide range of agencies to tackle the problem of drugs, but it is not one that the Council alone can resolve. All agencies are committed to working together, and it is through this approach that we will make the Borough safer.

#### **8.16 Question from Councillor Peter Golds**

Isle of Dogs residents continue to express concern at the loss of the three houses on Eastferry Road which were illegally pulled down, the future of the Victorian Pier Tavern, which although recently refused demolition could still be in danger and finally the future of the 110 year old, Cubitt Town Library, which is again under threat. Will the Mayor update the council as to what is being done to reassure Islanders about these valuable local assets?

#### **Response from Councillor Rachel Blake:**

There are no current proposals that would result in any changes to the Cubitt Town Library – it remains in use as an operational property to deliver library services.

The Council attaches great significance to protecting, celebrating and improving access to the historic environment. In doing so it recognises that heritage assets such as the houses on East Ferry Road, the Pier Tavern and Cubitt Town Library are important elements of the boroughs local distinctiveness and character.

It also understands the contribution that community facilities make to local character and the value they hold for local communities.

The Council robustly defends heritage assets in a manner that is appropriate to their significance, including, where possible, prosecuting those found to have unlawfully harmed the historic environment. The Council also protects community facilities so that they can continue to provide for an identified need. It is however an unfortunate fact that enforcement action after an unlawful demolition is a protracted and frustrating process. This is the same for all councils in this position.

### **8.17 Question from Councillor Aminur Khan**

Will the Mayor state how many Tower Hamlets Council run nurseries he plans to privatise?

#### **Response from Councillor Rachael Saunders:**

The Council directly runs three day nurseries - John Smith, Overland and Mary Sambrook. There are no plans to 'privatise' any of them.

We have no choice but to save £58m from our budget due to Tory cuts and the cost of dealing with the chaos we inherited from the previous Mayor. It is right that we look at whether a process to transfer management of these nurseries to a different sector, including the voluntary sector, would be a better use of our resources.

This would be through an open and transparent process and the specification will require the new providers to continue with the highly regarded provision, particularly the provision for SEN and the specialism in support for children who have hearing impairment and deafness.

### **8.18 Question from Councillor Maium Miah**

Will the Mayor update us on the total amount of cuts that were approved in his budget in February 2016 but were not achieved in the year by February 2017?

#### **Response from Councillor David Edgar**

The budget approved by Full Council in February 2016 included savings of £17.4m. The vast majority of the approved savings proposals have been achieved though some are now scheduled to take place in 2017-18 as we have been focused on taking the time to fully consult with service users and staff to get the changes right.

### **8.19 Question from Councillor Julia Dockerill**

Tower Hamlets has huge financial resource at its disposal from unspent s106 contributions. Yet all too many small parks, green spaces and leisure facilities in our borough look shabby and neglected. The Mayor has previously advised me that the council team with responsibility for improving our green spaces hasn't the capacity to deliver improvements. This being so, would he now look into contracting out more of these projects so that residents actually get the amenity improvements that local development is meant to pay for?

### **Response from Councillor Rachel Blake**

The council currently holds s106 funds of £2.46m for leisure facilities and a further £6.35m for landscaping and open spaces. The use of these funds is restricted by the s106 legal agreement, particularly in relation to the geographic area the funds can be spent in. In some cases, funds are restricted for specific locations or specified works.

All of the above funds have been allocated to projects with detailed approvals in place for 43% of funds. The delivery of these projects is regularly monitored at departmental level to ensure they are delivered on time and to budget.

The council is also developing a range of public realm / open space improvement projects, to provide a steady stream of projects for delivery over the coming years.

In addition, as part of the recent corporate restructure, the council reorganised the way it delivers capital schemes. All capital schemes are now to be delivered by the Property & Major Programmes service, with the client function sitting in the relevant department (e.g. the Parks Service). This will allow a more delivery-focused approach to these schemes; securing continuous improvement in how we deliver projects (including staffing, procurement and delivery efficiencies). This will ensure residents are able to benefit from improved amenities in their local area.

### **8.20 Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed**

Can the Mayor clarify if he is closing 18, 10, 8 or no Youth Centres?

### **Response from Councillor Rachael Saunders**

When the Mayor took office the youth service was in crisis. Many of the buildings where activities took place were in poor repair with only one or two sessions run a week and very few young people using them.

Since July 2016 the youth service has been delivered through an interim delivery model. Under this model there are 16 youth centres, made up of 8 youth centres run by council youth workers and a further 8 youth centres delivered by commissioned providers.

In January 2017, Cabinet agreed plans to make the youth service more efficient and to fix the problems of the past. This will improve the service for young people whilst also saving money for taxpayers. It is intended that there will continue to be 16 youth centres.

### **8.21 Question from Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim**

Will the Mayor update as to what is the average percentage of built-in inflation in the Council contracts of £1m and above?

### **Response from Councillor David Edgar**

The Council does not generally include provision for inflation within its contracts. The majority of contracts are awarded on a fixed price basis as contractors are expected to take price fluctuation into account when calculating their prices.

In exceptional cases such as complex or longer term contracts a base rate is agreed and contractors reimbursed for price fluctuation on certain items. For example; the Passenger Transport contract includes a Retail Price inflation (RPI) uplift in order to reflect variations in oil and fuel prices and avoid bidders adding excess premiums onto their bids to offset this risk.

### **8.22 Question from Councillor Craig Aston**

What is the Council's intention towards the Council owned green space known as the Limehouse Triangle on Salmon Lane. Given the known scarcity of green space in the Borough should this space not be used as part of the Borough's green grid rather than for housing?

### **Response from Councillor Rachel Blake**

The site known as the Limehouse Triangle forms part of the Locksley Estate.

The council took a decision to develop the site to provide much-needed council housing. In developing the scheme, there was extensive consultation with local residents in order to ensure that comments and any concerns were reflected in the eventual design.

The council is looking at providing high quality communal gardens and children's play space as well as the creation of a biodiversity area, as part of the development.

The Limehouse Triangle has mostly been inaccessible to residents for a significant period of time. The development of the site will give the council the opportunity to make other enhancements, such as reviving the existing dilapidated play area and include biodiversity enrichments, to the estate at the same time.

The demand for good quality social housing in the borough is high; in responding to that demand, the council must make the best use of its existing estate. This proposal will allow the council to deliver much needed homes (including family housing) while also delivering improvements for existing residents of the estate.

Seven consultation events have taken place for the Locksley Estate:

- The first two events took place in August 2015. We spoke to residents about the proposal to build new homes on the estate and asked for their views to help shape the design. 25 people in total attended.
- The next two sessions took place in January 2016 residents were presented with initial designs, based on resident's comments, and asked for further feedback. 31 people attended.
- Two more sessions of consultation events took place in March 2016 showing residents the latest designs reflecting some of the feedback received at the January consultation events, as well as providing an opportunity for residents to give further comments on the revised designs. 11 people attended.
- The final consultation was held May 2017 – presenting the final scheme prior to submitting a planning application. 3 people attended this.
- Invitation letters were sent to residents on the Locksley Estate and the surrounding blocks giving advance notice of the events. The letter contained the LBTH standard translation script in a number of community languages. Posters reminding residents of the events were put up around the estates a week prior to the meetings.
- Residents in the vicinity of the proposed development were door knocked on the day of the day of the event to encourage attendance.

### **8.23 Question from Councillor Shah Alam**

Can the Mayor state how many staff will lose their jobs through the cuts to the Careers Centre?

### **Response from Councillor Rachael Saunders**

By setting up a Single Employment Service for young people and integrating our Careers Service with the council's Employment and Enterprise team we will improve the offer to young people.

This will consolidate resources and deliver a more seamless service for young people from advice on careers options, to placement in apprenticeships or jobs. This will ensure the best possible training and employment outcomes for young people.

Given work to design the new service is still in progress the staffing impact of the changes has not yet been determined. As with all proposals which have a staffing impact, they will be subject to a full consultation with staff and unions and consideration of the equalities impact before any decisions are finalised.

#### **8.24 Question from Councillor Suluk Ahmed**

Will the Mayor inform exactly how many staff – not just full-time equivalent figure - will lose their jobs due to his budget cuts approved last month? Can he confirm the total number of staff – part-time or full time - have lost their job since June 2015?

#### **Response from Councillor David Edgar**

Savage government cuts, combined with the cost of clearing up the mess left by the previous Mayor, mean a challenging financial environment for the council.

We have changed the way the council plans ahead by publishing a three year budget to ensure greater opportunity to assess future workforce needs and undertake workforce planning activities to minimise the number of redundancies.

The final staffing impact of the budget proposals to deliver the savings required by the MTFs for the three year period 2017/18 to 2019/20 is still being determined as a number of business cases contained options which are being appraised and many are subject to a full consultation with staff and unions and consideration of the equalities impact before any decisions are finalised.

Since June 2015, there have been 122 redundancies. All have been on a voluntary basis.

To put this into context, under the previous Mayor, between 2012 and June 2015, 340 members of staff were made redundant.

#### **8.25 Question from Councillor Harun Miah**

What funding amounts and for which specific service areas remained unallocated in 2015/16 and 2016/17?

#### **Response from Councillor David Edgar**

Approximately £3.562m of prior year unallocated growth was used to support growth proposals in 2016/17 reducing total growth requirements in that year.

In 2016/17 there are a number of budgets held centrally for specific purposes which currently remain unallocated. Budget forecasts suggest that these will be spent by year end.

- Implementation of the Ethical Care Charter £1.0m
- Support for Higher Education £0.6m
- Planned Property Maintenance £0.523m
- Discretionary Housing Payments £1.0m
- Antisocial Behaviour Project £0.480m
- Inflation £2.6m

### **8.26 Question from Councillor Kibria Choudhury**

Does the Council have no statutory, welfare and/or moral responsibility to keep a record as to precisely how many people – not families – are currently housed in temporary accommodation – particularly children under the age of 16?

Will the Mayor undertake to ensure that this record is kept and monitored immediately to avoid potential abuse and impropriety that the Council can be liable for?

### **Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam**

The Council is required to provide prescribed information to the DCLG every quarter, including a snapshot figure at the end of each quarter of the number of households with dependent children and pregnant women with no other children and the total number of children/expected children. This is provided by type of temporary accommodation, for example bed and breakfast, self-contained accommodation and private sector leased accommodation.

Both the national figures and the figures by Local Authority are published on the DCLG website [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

The P1E is also published on the Council's website [http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/housing/housing\\_options\\_service/housing\\_and\\_homelessness\\_publi.aspx](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/housing/housing_options_service/housing_and_homelessness_publi.aspx)

### **8.27 Question from Councillor Gulam Robbani**

Will the Mayor share with residents and elected members the following:

- a) the Council's new communications strategy?
- b) the Council's campaigns schedule for 2017/18?
- c) if the Mayor has asked the communications team 'not' to send the standard daily media monitoring alerts to the elected members other than his administration? If he has not, will he ask the Head of Service to immediately start sending the daily media alerts to 'all' elected councillors?

- d) the Council's protocol and the legislation relating to the journalists or media filming the public full council meetings provided they give notice and are non-disruptive?
- e) the legislation and the Council's protocol to allow residents to undertake democratic, peaceful and non-disruptive protests at public meetings?
- f) if the Mayor has asked the Council's security to overzealously remove innocuous banners or display cards from the residents and discourage them when they come to peacefully and democratically voice their concerns at the council's public meetings? if the Mayor has not done so, can he explain why is this taking place under his administration that residents are being discouraged? Will he ensure that clear instruction is given to the council's security, facility and members team – particularly security - 'not to discourage the peaceful and civic democratic engagement', and continue to be courteous and helpful to all residents when they come to attend the council meetings?

### **Response from Councillor David Edgar**

(a)&(b)

The Communications Strategy and the Campaigns Schedule for 2017/18 are both in the course of development. It is anticipated that they will be submitted to the Corporate Management Team and the Mayor's Advisory Board shortly and thereafter published.

(c)

The Mayor has not asked for the daily media monitoring alerts to have limited circulation. The alerts are prepared for the Mayor, Cabinet and Corporate Management Team ie the Administration and the Senior Managers.

(d) The Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 as amended by the Openness of Local Government Regulations 2014 give members of the press and public the right to film and digitally report from all public meetings of local government bodies, and our guidance around filming reflects and endorses this right.

There is no specific media protocol but representatives of the media are requested to contact Communications to ensure their proposals will not be disruptive. Film recordings of recent full council and cabinet meetings are also available at the following address, <http://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>, but this is an additional service and in no way prevents the media from being able to attend and record/film in person, if they so desire.

(e) Provided residents who attend meetings act appropriately and do not disrupt the proceedings they may protest. However, if any protest is disruptive persons causing a disruption may be asked to leave the meeting.

(f) Anything that might put members of the public at risk or is disruptive to other people will not be allowed. This includes protest banners if for example they are long, obstruct people's views or contain poles that could injure people. A4 sheets on the other hand, as evidenced at the last council meeting, do not present any of the above issues and are therefore allowed.

Security and other staff are present to ensure that the meeting proceeds in an orderly fashion and that all present are not subject to health and safety risks. These duties will always be conducted with courtesy and respect for Members, officers and the public alike. The conduct of the council meeting is the responsibility of the Speaker of the Council and as a result the Mayor has no role in the arrangements for the conduct and security of Council meetings.

### **8.28 Question from Councillor Andrew Cregan**

What is the Mayor doing to address the borough's recycling rate of 21% - one of the poorest in the UK?

### **Response from Councillor Rachel Blake**

The current recycling rate for Tower Hamlets is 27%, which is similar to other London boroughs due to the challenges we all face with high rise developments and the problem of contamination.

Keeping our borough clean will always be a top priority and the Mayor's three-year Budget includes significant investment and measures to keep our streets clean.

The Budget includes extra street cleaning for areas with heavy visitor or residents populations, and a more robust approach to tackling dog fouling, littering and dumping.

The Council is working with registered providers to improve the recycling rate, and funding has been set aside to provide incentives to encourage registered providers to get involved in promoting recycling and tackling contamination.

The Council recently held a Member workshop on waste and recycling – I trust you found the session useful.

Recycling creates jobs, reduces waste disposal costs, helps tackle climate change and saves energy – so it's vital that we get recycling right.

This page is intentionally left blank