

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL****HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 19 JULY 2017****THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG****Members Present:**

Mayor John Biggs	Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Khaled Uddin Ahmed	Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Rajib Ahmed	Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Shafi Ahmed	Councillor Aminur Khan
Councillor Suluk Ahmed	Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Ohid Ahmed	Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Mahbub Alam	Councillor Ayas Miah
Councillor Shah Alam	Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Amina Ali	Councillor Md. Maium Miah
Councillor Abdul Asad	Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah
Councillor Asma Begum	Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Rachel Blake	Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim
Councillor Dave Chesterton	Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury	Councillor John Pierce
Councillor Andrew Cregan	Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor David Edgar	Councillor Candida Ronald
Councillor Marc Francis	Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs	Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Peter Golds	Councillor Andrew Wood
Councillor Shafiqul Haque	

The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Sabina Akhtar in the Chair

On behalf of the Council, the Speaker of the Council expressed great shock and sadness about the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower Fire that occurred on 14th June 2017. She thanked all those Officers and residents who had helped out and provided donations. She also expressed regret at the attack in Manchester at the Ariana Grande Concert and the attacks in other areas including on London Bridge, near Finsbury Park Mosque and the Westminster attack.

She called on everyone present to stand together, united in humanity and respect for one another. She stated that the Council's thoughts and prayers were with all those affected.

The Council rose to observe a minutes silence to remember those affected by the tragic events.

The Speaker brought Members up to date with her recent engagements. She reported that since the last meeting of the Council, she had supported a wide range of events including Citizenship Ceremonies, an Induction Day with new civic colleagues, an Army Engagement event in the Town Hall to learn about the opportunities for young people and Ramadan/Iftar celebrations. She wished all a belated Eid Mubarak.

She also had the privilege of welcoming Princess Royal, Princess Anne for the opening of the Graduate Centre at Queen Mary University of London, had attended the Royal Gun Salute to mark the state visit of HM King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia of Spain and had attended a 100 year birthday celebration.

Amongst her current projects, she highlighted that she was looking to extend the Speaker's Cadets to include the Army, Navy and Metropolitan Police.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Clare Harrison
- Councillor Gulam Robbani
- Councillor Chris Chapman

Apologies for lateness was received on behalf of Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillor Mohammed Maium Miah declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 6.1, 'Question relating to Project Stone' as he was a leaseholder of a One Housing property.

Councillors Muhammad Ansar Mustaquim and Ayas Miah declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5.1, 'Petition regarding Poplar HARCA' as leaseholders of a Poplar HARCA property.

Councillor Abdul Asad declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10.3 Report of the Audit Committee - Treasury Management Outturn Report 2016/17 as he had a pension with the Authority.

Councillor Helal Uddin declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5.1, 'Petition relating to Poplar HARCA' as his employer had a working relationship with Poplar HARCA and his wife had a leasehold interest in a Poplar HARCA property. He also declared a personal interest in Agenda 13.8 Motion on fire safety since Grenfell as he was a Council appointed Board Member of Tower Hamlets Homes.

Councillor Asma Begum declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5.4, 'Petition debate regarding Save Tower Hamlets Youth Sports' and as her

husband was a Board Member of the Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation.

Councillors with Declared Pecuniary Interests were required to leave the room for the duration of the relevant items.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 17 May 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and the Speaker be authorised to sign them accordingly.

4. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE SPEAKER OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Speaker congratulated Rushanara Ali and Jim Fitzpatrick on their re-election as MPs for the Poplar & Limehouse and Bethnal Green & Bow constituencies at the recent General Election. She also congratulated Councillor Julia Dockerill on her election as MP for Hornchurch and Upminster.

The Chief Executive then gave a brief report regarding the running of the General Election in the Borough held on 9 June 2017. He advised that the task of arranging the election was not the easiest of activities given the eight week time period to prepare and also the challenge of registering an unprecedented number of voters. Nevertheless, thanks to all the hard work, the challenges were successfully overcome. He was also pleased to report that there was a high turnout in both constituencies. He expressed gratitude to the staff and police as well as the political parties for helping the election run so smoothly. He was also grateful for the positive feedback.

5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

5.1 Petition regarding Poplar HARCA

Petitioners addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Mayor John Biggs then responded to the matters raised in the petition. Whilst acknowledging that the Council had no jurisdiction over Poplar HARCA, the Mayor reported that he had worked closely with the organisation to reduce parking charges and save social housing. He would continue to lobby the organisation to influence their decisions. He also stated that leaseholders could lobby the organisation over such matters as services charges and major works and he was happy to meet with the petitioners to consider their concerns.

RESOLVED:

1. That the petition be referred to the Acting Corporate Director, Place for a written response within 28 days.

5.2 Petition relating to Save Our NHS

Dr Jackie Applebee Turner and others addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Rachael Saunders, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Health and Adults Services then responded to the matters raised in the petition. She advised that the Mayor had confirmed that he would not sign up to the North East London Sustainability and Transformation Plan until a wide range of issues had been addressed. She stated that she would continue to fight against the plans to centralise services and the cuts to health budgets. She also reported that she had met with NHS colleagues to express concerns about the proposals and the draft plans were available on line for local residents to view. She looked forward to working with the petitioners to address their concerns.

RESOLVED:

1. That the petition be referred to the Corporate Director, Health, Adults and Community, for a written response within 28 days.

5.3 Petition relating to renewable energy

Petition not presented due to the absence of the petitioner.

RESOLVED:

1. That the petition be referred to the Acting Corporate Director, Place for a written response within 28 days.

5.4 Petition Debate – Save Tower Hamlets Youth Sports

Chris Dunne addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and the Council then debated the matters raised by the petition. Following a debate, the Mayor responded to the petition. Whilst recognising that the Trust was operating at a deficit, he explained that the Council could not provide funding to the Trust without a clear a business plan. The Mayor was however willing to explore ways of supporting youth sport and young people for example through an Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussion.

Procedural Motion

Councillor Oliur Rahman **moved** and Councillor Ohid Ahmed, **seconded**, a procedural motion “that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied such that item 13.12 Motion regarding John Biggs failing the Borough and austerity axing the Olympic Legacy be considered as the next item of business”.

The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **defeated**

Procedural Motion

Councillor Andrew Cregan **moved** and Councillor Rabina Khan, **seconded**, that under the rules for a Petition Debate, their motion on ‘Save Tower Hamlets Youth Sport’ be considered”. The text of the motion was as follows:

The Council Notes;

- In Tower Hamlets, the Head Teacher of Langdon Park School, Chirs Dunne, led a campaign to sustain the essential work of the School Sport Partnerships.
- Aided by the Local Authority and supported by Tower Hamlets Schools who collectively replaced the lost funds; the Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation (THYSF) was established.
- Although THYSF’s Board of Trustees raised funds and provided some guidance, staff employment remained with Langdon Park School.

THYSF delivers the following;

- Improves sports opportunities
- Increases sports & physical activity participation
- Utilise Sport for Personal and Community Development (Health, Social Cohesion, Educational Attainment, Youth Employment)

The Council Further Notes;

LBTH have now formally begun consultation with staff about the closure of this service. This will lead to:

- The combined school-community model which has led to huge improvements in the number of young people in Tower Hamlets participating in sport & physical activity
- The demise of opportunities for schools in Tower Hamlets to pool their Primary PE & Sport Premium funding for better strategic use (LBTH will return school funding to schools that is already committed for 2017-18)
- A decrease in the amount of physical activity and competitive sport experienced by over 30,000 young people in schools
- The demise of the **only** opportunities for young people in Tower Hamlets to participate in structured/competitive badminton, basketball, cricket, fencing, gymnastics, handball, hockey, judo, tennis or weightlifting.
- A loss of circa £250K additional funding secured for youth sport in Tower Hamlets
- The loss of 18 full time posts and over 50 part time positions, the vast majority of whom are borough residents (88% are under 25, 84% are BAME)

The Council Resolves;

- Suspend the current redundancy process in relation to all staff delivering THYSF services

- Instruct the business consultants currently working with Langdon Park School/THYSF staff to produce a full, public report to this Council meeting that outlines whether and how THYSF's current staff and services can exist as a business unit within the Council
- The Council's Sport & Physical Activity Department's staffing, function and budget falls within scope of the same review/report

At the end of the debate the tabled motion was put to the vote and was **defeated**

Mayor John Biggs **moved**, and Councillor Abdul Mukit **seconded**, a tabled motion on this subject [text of motion as set out in the resolution below].

Following debate, the tabled motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED:

This council notes:

- The good work Tower Hamlets Youth Sports Foundation have done over previous years.
- THYSF is not and has never been directly funded by the Council, though it has received MSG funding and last year the council provided financial support to cover its deficit.
- The THYSF is and has always been primarily funded by the schools they provide services to and as schools have withdrawn from funding THYSF their finances have become problematic.
- The current situation has arisen as a result of THYSF income falling far below their costs. Mainly as a result of schools choosing to pull out from funding the organisation.
- Currently the organisation's staff are formally employed by Langdon Park School. Given the increasing concerns about THYSF's finances the school no longer wish to host them as they could end up liable for any deficit.
- Whilst THYSF are not a council service, last year the council agreed to underwrite the THYSF deficit and support them to produce a viable business plan that demonstrated that THYSF can cover all its expenditure from the income it receives.
- After a number of time extensions, the Trustees concluded that they could not submit a balanced business plan.
- The Council has not withdrawn any of its existing funding sources, nor where we proposing to.

- With the Council is facing £58m in cuts over the coming years we cannot continue absorbing THYSF's overspends each year as that would mean having to cut other projects.

This council believes:

- It is clear that Government cuts have made it far harder for schools to afford the THYSF service.
- The Council worked hard to support THYSF however we cannot make an open-ended commitment to underwrite hundreds of thousands of pounds in costs with no funding strategy in place. To do so would mean cutting other important council services.

This council further notes:

- The Mayor's commitment that should THYSF close the council will step-in for a year to support the running of the inter-borough, School Games and London Youth Games before commissioning another organisation to run them in future years.
- The plan to offer schools a core package of support should THYSF close, including specialist, cricket, hockey, cycling, football and other sports in conjunction with national sport governing bodies and organisations like Middlesex Cricket, England Hockey and professional football clubs.
- The plan to devise a strategy, alongside sport national governing bodies, for elite sport provision in Tower Hamlets and to support local sport clubs.

This council resolves:

- To condemn the Government cuts to school budgets which have led to schools withdrawing from the THYSF resulting in significant financial problems.
- To welcome the Council's role in supporting THYSF over the past year but to note with sadness that to take over full running of the service would require the council to cut other services in order to fund it.
- To welcome the alternative plan put forward by the Mayor to support youth sport, including the provision of the inter-borough, School Games and London Youth Games and support local clubs and elite sports.

6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The following questions followed by a supplementary question were put and were responded to by the Mayor or relevant Executive Member:-

6.1 Question from Ahmed Hussain

1. Argent wants to make the most money out of the regeneration 2. OHG wants to increase its stock as much as it can and wants to borrow money against OUR property 3. The council wants to shift some of its residents from the waiting list to the newly built homes (even though they will not get the preferred 35% out of this regeneration); they also want to increase their receipt on council tax All of the above are supported by the council under the current Mayors Executive Power

But what is the council doing to ensure:

1. The current leasehold and freeholders will get a like for like property; surely the council needs to be fair for all and not just look after itself, housing association and the developer?

Response of Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development and Waste:

I fundamentally disagree with the assertion within the question and as far as I know so does the Mayor that all of the above are supported by the Council under the current Mayor's executive power. Not only does he not have the power on this but also I don't believe it to be our vision for the Island. Of course we will and we have acted fairly on this issue. One of the things I was most concerned about when we first came into administration was the lack of attention provided by the previous administration on this very issue. As far as I could tell they had done nothing to hold One Housing Group to account on some of the plans that they had brought forward. It is interesting that so many of them have left, they don't even want to hear our conversation now about what is to be done about some of these plans that lack consultation and that lack, frankly, common decency in terms of how they have related to residents. I would like to be really clear that I dispute your assertion that parts one, two and three of your question are supported by the Council and I look forward to what you have to say next.

Supplementary question from Ahmed Hussain:

If there was a chance I would probably rewrite my question, but that is not the option here today.

The things that the Mayor and yourself are doing are brilliant and especially what Candida Ronald is doing with the four estates forum, which I attend, but there is more to do. The thing is, that it is our houses. It is our livelihood and you really need to take that in consideration and my supplementary question is, if the last administration could deliver a like-for-like for the Blackwall Reach

regeneration on Robin Hood Gardens, then surely you can do that too or at least put some pressure to this regeneration to include like-for-like?

Councillor Rachel Blake's response to supplementary question:

I am really pleased that you think that what we are doing so far is brilliant. As you know we have set up a working group to hold them to account. We demanded that they were straight with residents when they put forward a bid, that they had no support from residents for additional grants and we have really been really clear with them that they have no understanding of their own stock and they have no vision for the consultation on this scheme and we have made sure, we have held them to account, we have made sure that they bring forward a proper stock condition analysis that the four estates working group, that I think you are probably aware of, they had done none of that work before we started to really probe some of their ideas. We completely understand that these are your homes and that is why some of the ways in which this project has been talked about has appalled us so much. Specifically with your point around Blackwall Reach, that came with millions of pounds of a Labour government investing in new social housing. That's a Labour government that I campaigned for solidly in 2005, in 2010 and 2015 and again in 2017 and it is a Labour government that will bring forward significant amounts of additional money for social housing. That is how they were able to provide that very special deal that leaseholders got in the Blackwall Reach scheme. In terms of like-for-like we have to keep talking about like-for-like and what that actually means to leaseholders. We really are keen to get to the bottom of what like-for-like will mean for people, but we have to acknowledge that that deal, the Blackwall Reach deal, of that significant amount of money and that significant offer for leaseholders was only available because the Labour government chose to put in significant Investments into new affordable housing and the Tory government that we have at the moment is only prepared to put additional money into keeping itself in power rather than getting people into affordable homes that they so desperately need. Thank you for the question I hope we can keep talking.

6.2 Question from Natasha Bolter:

Could the Mayor please highlight his approach to bullying within his workforce and the community at large?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

The answer is very simple. I am committed to tackling bullying both within the Council and across the Borough and unlike the previous administration I am an open and transparent Mayor and welcome constructive dialogue with everyone in our community whether they agree with me or not, rather than bullying those who disagree with me. More formally, if staff face concerns about bullying then there are proper personnel procedures and similar procedures apply if I think members of the public feel they are being oppressed in some way and I would want to uphold all of people's rights in our Borough to be protected from bullying.

Supplementary question from Natasha Bolter:

Mayor John Biggs, substantial allegations of islamophobia and bullying has come into the public domain by Councillor Khatun. This is putting politics into disrepute and it would be entirely improper and unprofessional to make such allegations without evidence. Can either you or Councillor Khatun affirm your claims with evidence and without proper evidence, one of you should resign?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

I am not aware of any formal allegation. I am aware there was a public meeting that was on the Twittersphere and was attended by a number of people, including yourself, at which various assertions were made, but as I have said if personnel face accusations or feel they have been bullied then there are proper procedures within the Council to protect their wellbeing of employees' well-being within the Council. If other members of a political party have a similar position, then within the rules of that party there will be procedures for those concerns to be pursued within the proper party complaints procedure, which is not really a matter which we would discuss publicly in the first instance. Sadly I can't see where your question is going and I think what we would need to see would be a formal process at the end of which people would form a conclusion.

6.3 Question from Kabir Hussain:

Will the Mayor inform how many empty properties (excluding second homes) were in the Borough for each year between 2010-2016/17, and at the present?

Response of Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development and Waste:

The Council Tax records of empty dwellings in the Borough, excluding second homes between April 2010 and April 2017, are:

April 2010 – 5,142
April 2011 – 4,757
April 2012 – 5,383
April 2013 – 4,596
April 2014 – 4,880
April 2015 – 4,233
April 2016 – 5,105
April 2017 – 6,211

Supplementary question from Kabir Hussain:

The Council record shows that there were 4,596 empty properties excluding second homes on 1st of April 2013, but it shot up to more than 6,098 empty properties in February 2017. Whilst huge waiting list, homelessness and housing crisis, do you think you are doing enough to tackle this issue of growing rate of empty properties.

Councillor Rachel Blake's response to supplementary question:

I think we could always do more on empty homes, I think there is always more to do. You will probably know that the way we tackle empty homes is, we have services that will pursue the people who are allowing their homes to stay empty. There is always a spike in empty homes when they are actually counted, because as soon as they come onto council tax records they are new homes and they might be waiting a short period before they come in. I should add that you heard my response earlier, I think that tackling empty homes is a really important part of solving London's housing crisis. I also think that building genuinely affordable social homes is the key way to solve London's affordability crisis. This administration is doing that. We set ourselves a target of 1,000 Council homes and we will also be looking into the empty homes that you are concerned about, but what we really want to see is some genuinely affordable homes coming forward in the Borough.

Question 6.4 was not put due to the absence of the questioner. A written response would be provided to the question. (Note: The written response is included in Appendix 'A' to these minutes.)

7. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor made his report to the Council, referring to his written report circulated at the meeting, summarising key events, engagements and meetings since the last Council meeting.

When the Mayor had completed his report and at the invitation of the Speaker the Leaders of the Independent Group, the People's Alliance of Tower Hamlets and Councillor Andrew Wood on behalf of the Leader of the Conservative Group, responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

8. STATE OF THE BOROUGH DEBATE

The Mayor gave his address, focusing on past achievements and future challenges regarding: ASB and crime, housing, employment and growth, the cost of living, children and young people services, environment and waste, fire safety works, the leadership of the Council and community cohesion. He felt that much progress had been made but more still needed to be done.

Councillor Oliur Rahman (Leader of the Independent Group) responded to the Mayor's addresses. He expressed concern about the quality of children and youth services, cuts to services, the increase in crime unemployment and the cost of living.

Councillor Peter Golds (Leader of the Conservative Group) also responded to the Mayor report. He welcomed the government's plans to provide additional funding for affordable housing and stressed the need for additional infrastructure to accommodate new developments and for action to address the increase in ASB and fire safety issues. He also shared his views on the proposed changes to the Greenwich Foot tunnel.

Councillor Rabina Khan (Leader of the People's Alliance of Tower Hamlets) also gave her views on the State of the Borough. She expressed concern about child safeguarding issues, child poverty levels, the increase in hate crime, equality and diversity issues and the cuts to services in view of these issues.

The Mayor John Biggs then responded to the points. He noted the need for the Council to serve all of the people within the community. He reported that he would continue to focus on this objective.

At the end of the item, the Speaker adjourned the meeting at 9:15pm. The meeting was reconvened at 9.25pm

9. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

The following questions and in each case supplementary questions were put (except where indicated) and were responded to by the Mayor or relevant Executive Member

9.1 Question from Councillor Denise Jones:

Can the mayor tell us what steps he has taken to ensure fire safety on Tower Hamlets Homes and other housing provider estates following the tragic Grenfell Tower disaster?

Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:

The Grenfell tower fire was a terrible tragedy and our thoughts and I know the prayers of everyone in the council go out to the victims, their friends and families.

The safety of Tower Hamlets residents is our top priority and in the wake of this tragedy we are taking the necessary precautions to protect residents.

All 900 blocks managed by Tower Hamlets Homes have had Fire Risk Assessments within the last year. The nine blocks identified as a "substantial" risk have been re-checked following the Grenfell Tower fire and works to reduce the risk level are underway, in close consultation with the London Fire Brigade.

The Mayor and senior officers met with local registered social housing providers to coordinate and provide mutual support in responding to resident concerns and Government guidance, particularly around cladding materials including emphasising the importance of robust FRAs, as well as working closely with the new Fire Brigade Commander.

Officers have also contacted private block owners and the Approved Inspectors responsible for ensuring construction materials and methods complied with building regulations.

The swift response to the recent fire at Dickinson House on Turin Street (Avebury Estate) demonstrated the readiness of the Council and Tower Hamlets Homes to act quickly and we've done fantastic work together.

Supplementary question from Councillor Denise Jones:

You have said that all the Tower Hamlets Homes properties have had new Fire Risk Assessments done in the last 9 months or so and I would like to know how these will be monitored in the future and how we are keeping those up. And also can you tell us how many Tower Hamlets Homes blocks had valid Fire Risk Assessments when you became the Mayor?

Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:

In the last nine months we ensured that all Tower Hamlets Homes blocks as well as RPs had approved FRAs. Prior to Mayor Biggs being elected we had no approved FRAs within the Council. In the last 9 months we have managed to get those done. How would we monitor FRAs, FRAs are carried out on a regular basis, an annual basis, so they will be rechecked, but I think that the Grenfell fire enquiry will probably recommend a newer kind of FRA regime, so you may know that FRAs only look at internal areas not the external cladding, so it could be a recommendation that we bring in more robust FRAs following the enquiry recommendations.

9.2 Question from Councillor Ohid Ahmed:

Can the Mayor confirm the precise figures and names of the high-rise buildings as well as tower blocks in the borough which are 'unsafe' or 'at risk' because of the 'substantial' or 'significant' fire risk, and what action has he taken to make sure these are safe?

Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:

The nine Council-owned blocks that were identified as a "substantial" risk in Fire Risk Assessments are Alzette, Brewster, Brodick, Malting, Modling, Offenbach, Puteaux, St Gilles and Velletri Houses.

Works are instructed and underway to reduce the risk to these blocks. None of these blocks are at risk due to the Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) type cladding which was installed at Grenfell Tower.

Brodick House has been undergoing significant works for a number of years and once complete later this year will be reassessed with our expectation the FRA rating will be significantly reduced.

The Mayor announced earlier this week that work on all other blocks which have a substantial rating are being procured and will start as soon as possible.

Obviously the only reason we know which blocks have fire safety issues is because unlike the previous administration we have undertaken a full suite of Fire Risk Assessments. Under the former Mayor and lead member for Housing many of these blocks developed significant problems which Mayor Biggs and I are now addressing after years of neglect.

Supplementary question from Councillor Ohid Ahmed:

Can I remind you that one of the independent expert on fire safety, professor Arnold Dix said that a fact is that Grenfell Tower burned so fast despite being deemed only a medium risk in the Fire Risk Assessments, showed that that a fire assessment did not work, so we need to take a lesson from this. Will the Mayor publish all FRAs as well as the planning assessments for the constituents in this Borough?

Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:

In terms of the fire I think there would be lessons learnt following the enquiry and we will follow those recommendations. Bracknell house 2009, recommendations came out; your administration failed to deliver on those recommendations, which is not good for the safety of this Borough. FRAs, the Mayor has already made a commitment that we will make all FRAs available to residents, we will probably start with the tower blocks first, I think that's the most important ones. We have committed, in terms of blocks, we cannot publish this now until DCLG give us the clearance.

9.3 Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed:

Can the Mayor update the council on his housing plans including the opening of Watts Grove and the new Private Renters Charter?

Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:

As you know the Mayor launched a new Housing Strategy with the aim of tackling the affordable housing crisis in Tower Hamlets and driving up standards. Since 2015 we have made massive strides in that work.

As you note, we recently launched a new Private Renters Charter to guarantee private renter's rights and improve quality of life for renters. Last year we also introduced a landlord licensing scheme in three wards and we are keen to extend that further should government allow it. To tackle the affordability crisis we are making major progress on the Mayor's pledge of 1,000 new homes. The new Watts Grove estate will begin to open next month providing 148 new council homes.

Supplementary question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed:

Thank you Councillor Islam. It seems like a lot is happening. Could you tell us how you are working to make housing more affordable?

Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:

In addition to the 1,000 council homes the Mayor is working to deliver we have delivered 1,070 new affordable homes last year and 1,073 the year before – far higher than under Lutfur Rahman and Councillor Rabina Khan who delivered just 630 in 2012/13 and only 595 in 2013/14. Though we accept affordable homes need to be genuinely affordable to local people. That is why for our new council homes, we have introduced far lower rents.

Under the previous Mayor and the then Cabinet Member for Housing, the average rents for new council developments were £239.08 a week for a two bed property. Under Mayor John Biggs' new policy, rents will be based on a combination of London Affordable Rent at £152.73 and the new Tower Hamlets Living Rent at £223.14 a week, both of which are significantly lower than rents under the previous administration.

The change means, compared to the previous Mayor's rent levels, a family living in a new three bed property will be up to £5,791 better off as a result of Mayor Biggs' changes.

9.4 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood about fire safety inspections:

Is the Mayor satisfied that all buildings in Tower Hamlets with cladding have now been checked or are in the process of being checked and that fire safety assessments are up to date?

Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:

Fire Risk Assessments to Council blocks managed by Tower Hamlets Homes are up to date as I have already explained.

The Council does not have authority to inspect Fire Risk Assessments carried out by other landlords, but all registered social housing providers locally report that they are up to date with Fire Risk Assessments and that any issues are being addressed.

All Council blocks over six storeys with cladding have been checked and all registered social housing provider blocks over six storeys with cladding have been checked or are in the process of being checked.

Officers have also contacted the Approved Inspectors responsible for ensuring construction materials and methods complied with building regulations on private blocks.

The Council does not have authority to require private owners to check cladding on privately owned blocks nor to provide their FRAs which has proved to be a significant problem responding to Grenfell and one which has been raised a number of times with Government. We are however doing all we can to contact and urge the managers of private tower blocks to follow suite.

Supplementary question from Councillor Wood:

Obviously the focus has been on Tower Hamlets Homes and social housing, but there was a brief mention there about private housing and hospitals and schools, but can the Cabinet member talk about other buildings as well especially hospitals and schools, whether there is any information about the checking of those in particular?

Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:

Yes. On top of the social housing that we are checking for cladding, my colleagues Councillor Amy Whitelock-Gibbs and Councillor Rachael Saunders have been talking to unions and schools as well and so far we haven't come across any of this cladding on other public buildings.

9.5 Question from Councillor Candida Ronald:

What is the Mayor doing to ensure that the failures revealed by the Clear Up investigation can never happen again, whoever is Mayor?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

The clear up project was launched in September 2016 following discussions between the commissioners and myself and the senior leadership of the Council. By the time nominations closed on the 8th of December, 66 allegations had been received which have all been investigated. I committed at the onset of the project that the final report would be made public along with the investigators comments, which are here on the agenda this evening. No alterations have been made to the report. How do we ensure things never happen again? Well it's about changing the culture, the reporting framework and the relationships between Members and officers and relationships between Members and each other. Ensuring our codes and our probity arrangements are squeaky clean and everyone understands what should be happening, what their duties are to each other and to themselves and to the residents of Tower Hamlets. By working on that I think we can achieve a better arrangement. It is fundamentally part of the cultural change we need to make in this Borough, which I talk to members about from time to time.

Supplementary question from Councillor Candida Ronald:

Are you confident that any new systems will be robust enough to withstand any future assault?

Mayor John Biggs response to supplementary question:

I think any system can be tested to destruction by bad behaviour or by malevolent intent. What we need to do is have an empowered Council which will hold the Mayor to account. We have to have an empowered opposition that will hold the administration to account. We have to have statutory officers, we have a new monitoring officer who is a permanent employee, as her predecessor, sadly not here was, rather than an acting person who is at the

end of a piece of string from the Mayor or from the political leadership. We need to have proper understanding and relationships and probity in those relationships. By doing that I think we can be more assured, although we always need to watch out for the behaviour of people who will try and work the system.

9.6 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan:

Will the results of the cladding tests of both council and social high rise tower blocks in Tower Hamlets be made public?

Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:

The protocol with DCLG is that cladding test results conducted by the Building Research Establishment are reported to the Council and not made public until residents and local MPs in the affected blocks have been informed of the results. After that, the test results can and will be published.

Supplementary question from Councillor Rabina Khan:

My question is about the hospital right near me. I do wonder whether or not, what sort of cladding or whatever material has been used there, whether or not there could be a possibility of just finding this out? I ask in the interests of everyone in this community.

Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:

Yes, I totally understand. I think I have already answered that question. It needs be my colleague Councillor Saunders can talk to them herself and get some confirmation.

9.7 Question from Councillor Helal Uddin:

Can the lead member give an update on the performance of Work Path?

Response of Councillor Joshua Peck, Cabinet Member for Work & Economic Development:

It is early days for work path. It is effectively the first quarter, so I don't want to make any early judgements, but certainly things look very positive. We have seen, even in the first quarter, a 24% increase in the number of residents who are engaging, up from 340 to 420. A 54% increase in the number of residents starting work and a 42% increase in the number of employers that we have got on board.

Supplementary question from Councillor Uddin:

You may be aware there are long term issues of people in this borough who are long-term unemployed and also I am sure you are particularly aware of the approach we are having from Jobcentre Plus. There is a soft approach to addressing the long-term unemployment issue and economic increase in the

borough. Do you have any plans for how you will address these particular issues?

Councillor Joshua Peck's response to supplementary question:

We have got lots of plans. You will remember that in the Mayor's last budget we put an extra £5 million into schemes to enable our residents to break down some of the barriers that keep them out of work. We have made a major extension of the women into health and social care programme. This work with many women across the Borough, who are probably the biggest group who face long-term unemployment and barriers to work. We are massively increasing our ESOL provision, both by recruiting more tutors, also putting in place vocational ESOL training but also by setting up an ESOL hub that enables us to direct residents to spare places on other suppliers' courses. We've got an over 50's adviser already in place and working and with Councillor Whitelock-Gibbs. We are leading a really big project to look at how we can break down the barriers to affordable child care that keeps many people out of work. So there's a massive amount going on, some really positive early stuff.

9.8 Question from Councillor Oliur Rahman:

Can the Mayor confirm what salary is he claiming at present from the Council - is it the full increase to his pay packet that he granted himself in his budget - and since when has he claimed this full increase? Will he confirm if he receives any other allowances, salaries, money or perks from the Council or elsewhere?

(In addition, notwithstanding what may or may not be currently on the council website buried in reports, for the sake of transparency and for the benefit of residents who may not have time to explore website links or read reports full of jargons, will the Mayor clearly list all his current, past and up to date hospitality/gifts, salaries, allowances and any financial interests since the day he became the Mayor, and list the full details in the minutes for a simple public record reference?)

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

As you well know, when I became Mayor I proactively reduced my allowance to £30,000 for my first year which was less than half of the allowance for the Mayor in Tower Hamlets. All allowances are within or below the levels recommended by the 2014 report of the independent panel. I happen to be the lowest paid Mayor in London as well. When allowances were increased in 2016 I only took half of the rise for that year. This year there has been no increase in my allowance, but I have chosen to take the full allowance. Unlike some of my predecessors I believe the Mayor is a full time job. I regularly work 6 days a week. I start here just after 7 a.m. and get home around 10 p.m. in the evening, I must be crazy I think, but I do it out of a sense of duty and service. I do not receive any additional allowances, salaries or perks from the Council. I don't claim for a telephone. I don't claim for travel other than three exceptions, when I have been to conferences outside of London and the train

fare has been paid for by the Council and on two occasions overnight stays, which I was very reluctant to take up, because I prefer being in Tower Hamlets.

Supplementary question from Councillor Rahman:

What the Mayor did not say was when he first started here he was getting two salaries. He was getting paid from the GLA and he was getting money from the Council, so clearly you had more money than what you actually told us Mr Mayor. Do you think you getting a 14.24% pay rise you are putting residents first or yourself first and would you apologise for the hypocrisy, when your group was in opposition for the motion that was put down to cut the Mayor's salary?

Mayor John Biggs' response to supplementary question:

I have stated very clearly, I think it was a mistake of the opposition group when the previous Mayor was Mayor, to cut his salary in the way they did. I think it is a serious job and we should expect whoever takes that job on to receive a pay which is similar to or greater than that of a Member of Parliament. I am very clear about that. The previous Mayor's expenses, you talked about junkets and so on, in a 6 month period he took 85 cab journeys costing taxpayers £2,789. If I pick on one member, say, Oliur Rahman, he took £1,841 for 67 cab rides, including 39 between Stratford Jobcentre, where he works and the Town Hall. Maybe with his new concern for taxpayers' money, he can tell us if he intends to pay any of those journeys back. It is very important that we get value for money and I think that when there is a fantastic transport system people should think very hard before they use a taxi service.

9.9 Question from Councillor John Pierce:

How many meetings of Tower Hamlets Homes board were inquorate, preventing key strategic decisions being made, due to non-attendance of councillors, appointed by Mayor Rahman from 2012 – 2015?

Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing:

THH is an incredibly important organisation for 20,000 of our residents and any councillor appointed to their Board has a duty to engage properly for the benefit of those residents.

I am disappointed, but not surprised, to report that five Board meetings were cancelled under the previous administration between 2012 and February 2015 due to the non-attendance of at least two Councillors. Another had to be abandoned half way through as the councillors walked out. That's almost 40% of meetings disrupted or cancelled.

The councillors who sat on the Board at this time were:

- Alibor Choudhury
- Kabir Ahmed (until May 2014)

- Lutfa Begum (Until May 2014)
- Gulam Robbani
- Maium Miah (From Oct 2015)
- Abdul Asad (From Oct 2015)

All from Tower Hamlets First. Their attendance was appalling. The worst was Lutfa Begum who attended just 20% of meetings then Councillor Gulam Robbani who attended just 38%.

By that standard I suppose we should congratulate Councillors Miaum Miah and Abdul Asad who managed to turn up to a third of their meetings, but Just not good enough.

Supplementary question from Councillor Pierce:

Do you agree that if Tower Hamlets Homes had been in a housing association it would have been downgraded by the regulator and they would be considering taking over that organisation, because of actions of the members opposite. The two thousand homes that are managed locally would have been taken away from the control of the Council. How concerned are you about the failings of the members opposite, in regards to the management of our housing provider and aren't we lucky that there were no serious incidents in our neighbourhoods whilst they were in control of Tower Hamlets Homes?

Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:

I totally agree Councillor Pierce and since Mayor Biggs' election, not a single meeting of Tower Hamlets Homes Board has been inquorate, with all our Councillors on board. Yes, it probably would be downgraded. We know about Poplar HARCA, we spoke about this earlier on, that because non-attendance of Council Members that RP decided to reject Councillors on that board. I am sure that other RPs could do the same as well and it is not right that when we put members on RP boards, or Tower Hamlets Homes Board that we have a responsibility for them to deliver for the residents of this Borough and not just turn up to the meetings they like and walk out of those meetings they dislike.

9.10 Question from Councillor Peter Golds:

Will the Mayor inform the council as to whether the four homeless families have moved into the Shoreditch area property stated in the decision of the Asset Management Board seven months ago on the 9th December 2016?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

In April of this year I signed a Mayoral decision allowing a meanwhile use for a community organisation whose mosque was planned to undergo works that would require decanting. The organisation, the City Bangladeshi Cultural and Community Centre has already received planning permission. It is my understanding that adaptation for the site into residential occupation would take 6 months to be on site. This is partly because it had been squatted and vandalised by the squatters, so needed further work to get it into good order.

The arrangement with the City Bangladeshi Cultural and Community Centre was with very clear conditions which required the mosque to vacate once their existing premises are refurbished. They haven't yet taken up occupation because they haven't satisfied those conditions. It remains to be seen whether they will be able to. As part of the decision we evaluated the financial cost and the timelines and I think this represents reasonable value for the people of Tower Hamlets and a good service for the community if it goes ahead.

Supplementary question from Councillor Golds:

Will, at some point, 10 Turin Street be returned for housing with people and if so when is this likely to happen?

Mayor John Biggs' response to supplementary question:

My intention would be that it be refurbished and made available for full housing units sometime during next year, which was indicated on the timeline in the mayoral decision, which I believe has been published and I am happy to talk to the member outside this meeting about that.

9.11 Question from Councillor Marc Francis:

When will there be a safer crossing over the A12 at Wick Lane?

Response of Councillor Amina Ali, Cabinet Member for Environment:

We have been working closely with TfL Signals on the design of improvements to accommodate pedestrian phases into the signals at this junction.

I am pleased to announce agreement and final approval on the design and modelling has almost been finalised and there is a provisional date for completion of the works by December 2017.

The proposals include:

- Green man phases across all on and off slip roads from the A12;
- Narrowing of the entry slips to one carriageway width to provide a shorter distance for pedestrians to cross;
- Footway redesign at Wick Lane to reduce the width of the mouth of the junction;
- Revised traffic management orders to stop the straight across movement from off slip to on slip, thus restricting movements to one lane right turn, one lane left turn at each exit slip;
- Further consideration is also being given to extending the box junctions to keep the area clear and prevent vehicles blocking the junction.

Finally, I just want to say that safety is paramount to us; we will continue to look at ways to improve safety in the borough.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Marc Francis:

Can I welcome the lead member and congratulate her on her appointment and especially her speedy success after 12 long years of lobbying and campaigning for a pedestrian crossing, all we needed to do at the outset was for the lead member to come from Bow West ward. Can the lead member ensure us the London Borough of Tower Hamlets will press for early implementation of the new pedestrian crossing in 2018?

Councillor Amina Ali's response to supplementary question:

As I stated there is a provisional date for completion of works of December 2017. Therefore in line with this Council's commitment to safety, I am hopeful we will be able to push for this date.

9.12 Question from Councillor Shah Alam:

Following the stabbing of Syed Jamanoor Islam, the Mayor committed to the requests of the family in Altab Ali park, can he please provide an update to the council as to what he has completed to date?

Response of Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Community Safety:

The terrible murder of Syed Jamanoor Islam was a tragedy and our thoughts are with his family at this difficult time.

Tackling knife crime to prevent these tragedies is a top priority for the council.

The Mayor agreed he would support London citizens in any campaign they launched on knife crime and he stands by that pledge. However we have not been idle on this issue. Following the rise in knife crime earlier this year a partnership task and finish group was set up.

This task force has resulted in:

- A number of Community/police and council weapon sweeps in target areas.
- A rolling programme of knife test purchase activity is going on.
- We are educating young people with intervention programmes in a community setting.

We still have a long way to go and more work is definitely needed.

No supplementary question was asked.

9.13 Question from Councillor Danny Hassell:

Will Tower Hamlets have a Creative Enterprise Zone when announced by the GLA later this year?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

I certainly hope so and, on the creative Enterprise zones, we are working with the Mayor of London and the GLA in establishing Fish Island and The Lower Lea Valley as a Zone. They are important areas in the cultural fabric of London and it is important to get things like the affordability of creative work spaces and ensure that in planning decisions we maintain creative work spaces and we support the creative industries, they are major employers in our Borough and we have for too long neglected the SME sector. I am working with Councillor Rachel Blake and with Councillor Joshua Peck on the employment and the regeneration aspects of this. It is important for our Borough that we maintain our creative sector and do not allow it to be squeezed out. One of the great anxieties in that area of Fish Island is that property development will squeeze people out of the area. And working in partnership with the London Legacy Development Corporation, I am hoping we can achieve some good objectives to that end.

No supplementary question was asked.

Questions 9.14 - 29 were not put due to lack of time. Written responses would be provided to the questions. (Note: The written responses are included in Appendix 'A' to these minutes.)

10. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES**10.1 Report of the Executive - Clear Up Board Final Report**

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance, presenting the findings of the Clear Up Board.

Following debate, the recommendation was put to the vote and was **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

1. That the report of the Clear Up Board be noted.

Extension of time limit for the meeting

Councillor Danny Hassell **moved**, and Councillor Sirajul Islam **seconded**, a procedural motion that "under Procedure Rule 15.11.7 the meeting be extended for up to an additional 20 minutes to enable the remaining reports on the agenda to be considered".

The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

10.2 Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2016/17

Councillor John Pierce, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2016-17, presented the Committee's Annual Report for that year.

Following debate, the recommendation was put to the vote and was **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2016-17 be noted.

10.3 Report of the Audit Committee - Treasury Management Outturn Report 2016/17

The Council considered the report of the Audit Committee setting out the Treasury Management Outturn for 2016/17.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

That the Council note:

1. The Treasury Management activities and performance against targets for the twelve months to 31 March 2017.
2. The Pension Fund investments balance (set out in section 9 of Annex A to the report).
3. The Council's investments as at 31 March 2017 (as in Appendix 2 of Annex A to the report).
4. The Prudential indicators outturn for 2016/17 (set out in Appendix 1 of Annex A to the report).

11. TO RECEIVE REPORTS AND QUESTIONS ON JOINT ARRANGEMENTS/EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS (IF ANY)

There was no business to transact under this agenda item.

12. OTHER BUSINESS

12.1 Late Night Levy

The Council considered the report of the Chief Executive in respect of the Late Night Levy consultation process.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

1. To note the use of the delegated powers by the Chief Executive under part 2 of the constitution, Article 12.06(c)(ii) due to an emergency or extreme urgency whether or not reserved to the Council to enable the commencement date of the late night levy to be rescinded. The reason being that there was not a full Council meeting between the service of the Judicial Review application from ALMR and the 1st June.
2. To note the proposed new commencement date of the 1st January 2018 and the further re-consultation the outcome of which will be brought back to full Council for further consideration and decision as to whether or not to adopt the levy.

12.2 Proposed Revision to the Constitution - Part 3.3 (Overview and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference)

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance proposing a number of revisions to Part 3.3 (Overview and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference) of the Council's Constitution

The recommendations were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

1. That it be resolved that the Muslim Faith representative on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is able to vote on Education matters; and
2. That the Terms of Reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Part 3.3 of the Constitution be amended by the Monitoring Officer to reflect that the Muslim Faith representative can vote on Education matters

12.3 Proposed Revision to the Constitution - Parts 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance proposing a number of revisions to Parts of the Council's Constitution.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

That the Council note:

- The spreadsheet in Appendix 1 of the report setting out the revisions and the reasons;

That the Council approve:

- The revised Part 4.2 of the Constitution (Access to Information Procedure Rules) in Appendix 2 with the revisions shown as tracked changes;
- The revised Part 4.3 of the Constitution (Budget and Policy Framework Procedure) in Appendix 3 with the revisions shown as tracked changes;
- The revised Part 4.5 of the Constitution (Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules) in Appendix 4 with the revisions shown as tracked changes;
- The revised Part 4.6 of the Constitution (Financial Regulations and Procedure Rules) in Appendix 5 with the revisions shown as tracked changes; and
- The revised Part 4.7 of the Constitution (Contracts and Procurement Procedure Rules) in Appendix 6 with the revisions shown as tracked changes.

12.4 Proposed Revision to the Constitution - Part 5.2 (Planning Code of Conduct)

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance proposing a number of revisions to Part 5.2 (Planning Code of Conduct) of the Council's Constitution.

The recommendation was put to the vote and was **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

1. That the revised Planning Code of Conduct in Appendix 1 of the report be approved.

13 TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

None of the submitted Motions were debated due to lack of time

The meeting ended at 10.30 p.m.

Speaker of the Council