

**APPENDIX A – WRITTEN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONS THAT WERE NOT
PUT AT THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING
(15 January, 2020)**

9.15 Question from Councillor Marc Francis

Will the Lead Member for Housing Services explain the rationale for the proposal to scrap Band 3 of the Choice Based Lettings scheme effectively denying those 8,000 households the chance of a move to social housing in Tower Hamlets unless they become disabled, homeless or overcrowded?

Response of Sirajul Islam, Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing:

The consultation is on 5 proposals to make the Allocations Scheme work best for residents one of which was to change the criteria for Band 3 – there was not a suggestion to scrap it.

However with 20,000 people on the housing register and only 1,329 lets last year there are many in band 3 who are unlikely to be successful. There has also been a 40% drop in total lets compared to 2015/16.

The real scandal here is that central government has failed to tackle the housing crisis - something we are taking action on locally. This includes our ambitious plans to have 2,000 new council homes in delivery by 2022 and we continue to have some of the highest numbers of new affordable homes in the country.

However the Mayor has heard residents' concerns about potential changes to Band 3 and while we continue to want to hear resident views on the proposal will not agree any changes going ahead without considerably more thought on its impact. This means that the proposal on Band 3 will not now go ahead in their current form.

9.16 Question from Councillor Asma Islam

The Conservative Party's general election manifesto promised to 'continue the roll-out of Universal Credit' – does the Mayor think this is the right thing to do given the impact of universal credit on residents in Tower Hamlets?

Response of Councillor Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Planning, Air Quality and Tackling Poverty:

I've called for Universal Credit to be scrapped. Its roll out has led to hardship for our residents.

Here in Tower Hamlets we have flagged 700 errors to the Department of Work and Pensions since April 2018 – these errors resulted in £335k in overpayments and £215k in underpayments.

The continuing errors show it's not fit for purpose. It's impossible for our residents to budget when they are being regularly underpaid or suddenly hit with bill for overpayments.

Trussell Trust the food bank network carried out research which found when Universal Credit goes live in an area, there is a demonstrable increase in demand in their foodbanks. On average, 12 months after roll-out, food banks see a 52% increase in demand, compared to 13% in areas with Universal Credit for 3 months or less.

The Mayor's Tackling Poverty Fund helps advise residents hit by Universal Credit and we're also working with the Child Poverty Action Group to understand exactly how Universal Credit is hitting the borough and what needs to change for a fair system.