

Mayor's Report to Council

11th March 2020

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Key Events/Announcements

Council Budget

The council has approved its budget for 2020/21. It prioritises the protection of the borough's most vulnerable residents while investing in community safety, housing and public health.

The budget proposals, formally adopted at a meeting of the full council on 19 February, were shaped by an extensive public consultation and include continued funding commitments for key services that residents and businesses have said they value and rely on.

We continue to face unprecedented financial challenges as a result of central government funding cuts. In Tower Hamlets, we've had to save £190 million since 2010 and in the next three years we expect to need to save a further £39m.

Despite this, we have passed a budget that sets out an ambitious and positive plan for the next three years. We're putting our most vulnerable residents first and protecting frontline services while investing in new homes, better jobs and cleaner, greener, safer streets.

Council tax will increase by 1.99 per cent, with an additional two per cent increase which will be spent specifically on the delivery of adult social care. This increase is being made by many councils up and down the country reflecting the enormous budget pressure we face. Tower Hamlets is still expected to have the seventh lowest council tax in the country.

This year's budget will:

- Invest in Idea Stores, libraries, gyms, leisure centres and parks.
- Allocate an extra £7.2m for children's social care and special educational needs and disabilities and a further £12.4m for supporting vulnerable adults.
- Continue to fund additional police officers to keep our streets safe and tackle drug-related crime.
- Deliver new council homes and thousands more new affordable homes.
- Provide free school meals for all primary school pupils in the borough.
- Keep the streets clean with a new in-house waste service.

- Protect the poorest in our communities with a 100 per cent council tax discount and a range of programmes funded by our Tackling Poverty Fund.
- Support thousands more local people into work or training.
- Transform our neighbourhoods through our Liveable Streets programme to cut down on rat running, improve air quality and make our roads more pedestrian friendly.

But let me be clear, we remain very concerned about the impact of the 'Fair Funding review' – a Government review of council-funding which could take money away from areas of high deprivation like Tower Hamlets and redirect it to other areas, and many of these initiatives will be under threat because of this.

Local Government Association figures show it could mean that Tower Hamlets loses at least a further £3.1m in social care funding with significantly larger cuts still to follow once the 'Fair Funding review' is finalised. Meanwhile Council's outside of London like Hampshire and Surrey would see a £35m and £25m boost respectively.

Government budget

Today the government announced its budget plans. I welcome the moves to bolster the economy in the face of the threat of coronavirus.

What we didn't see was a move to end austerity for the local services that are the bedrock for our communities.

There is no extension of statutory sick pay to those on zero-hours contracts, nothing for others without a contract of employment, no suggestion that sick pay levels will be increased, and no new money for our struggling social care system.

After a decade of austerity I remain concerned about the position this has left services like the NHS which will now be tested - but we must of course come together as a country to tackle Coronavirus.

Coronavirus

There have been four confirmed cases in Tower Hamlets at the time this report was written.

As a council we are following the Public Health England Guidance and are monitoring the situation to ensure we are prepared to respond as the situation evolves.

As with any virus, such as the common cold or flu, the best way to protect yourself and those around you is to practice good hygiene through washing your hands thoroughly and using a tissue when you sneeze. We will continue to monitor and respond to this and reassure residents through our communications channels. Of course the advice may change.

Industrial Disputes

Due to an industrial dispute between our waste contractor and its staff, we are expecting bin collections and street cleaning services to be severely disrupted during the week.

The council has been in communication with both parties and urged them to try to reach an agreement in an effort to avoid disruptive strike action. We regret that this has not yet been possible.

We apologise for the inconvenience this will cause and would like to reassure residents that we are working with our contractor in an effort to return to a normal service as soon as possible.

I appreciate this will cause disruption to residents.

This is of course a separate matter to the council bringing the waste service in house at the end of the month which I have high hopes will bring significant improvements to the service we are able to deliver by giving the council more direct control to respond to residents' needs.

The council also continues to seek a resolution to the current industrial dispute in relation to changes in terms and conditions for council staff. The latest proposals have been significantly amended to reflect staff and union concerns and we hope that an agreement can be reached to avoid strike action.

Liveable streets

The £15m Liveable Streets investment continues with Bethnal Green and Wapping schemes having come to Cabinet for approval.

We've listened to concerns about the impact on Columbia Road Market and will work on the final plans to consider this.

Design of schemes in Barkantine, Bow, Brick Lane, Old Ford West and Shadwell are under way and in total 17 areas will benefit.

SEND consultation

We are consulting on proposed changes to the council's policy on travel assistance for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

This is available on our new consultation hub and the consultation is open until 6th May.

The council has a statutory duty to provide travel assistance to eligible children with SEND between the ages of five to 16. We can also decide to offer travel assistance to those under five and those aged 16 to 19 with an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

There will be no immediate change to SEND travel assistance to those with the most complex needs.

We want to promote greater independence for children and young people with SEND by working with them to meet their needs and those of their families. We have developed eight travel assistant proposals that we think will achieve this, which offer greater choice and flexibility.

The proposals are also our response to new draft government statutory guidance, our recent transport review, wider council strategies and policies and the need to be more efficient with our funds.

Women's history month and International Women's Day

As a council we are marking Women's history month and International Women's Day. I attended 2 events on International Women's Day on Sunday to mark this celebration of women.

SEND campaign Petition hand-in to Number 10

I joined Tower Hamlets parents, pupils, schools, the National Education Union and MPs on Friday (28th February 2020) to issue a £12m invoice to the Prime Minister to cover the cost of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) crisis. The invoice, which has been signed by hundreds of parents and school staff across Tower Hamlets, was handed in to 10 Downing Street after campaigners marched from Parliament Square to Downing Street.

The Government's funding SEND services has failed to keep pace with rapidly rising demand, leaving local councils across the UK to pick up the bill. National Education Union (NEU) research shows that '93% of local authorities have lost out on SEND funding since 2015 because of central government's shortfall in special needs provision.'

The Local Government Association estimates that councils in England are facing a SEND funding gap of up to £1.6 billion by 2021.

In Tower Hamlets, the council received £49.7m for SEND funding in 2018/19 but spent more than £56m on services, with the overspend projected to reach £12m by 2022. The invoice demands that the Government fills in this shortfall

with additional cash. I also handed in a letter addressed to the PM urging him to increase high needs funding in the upcoming Government Budget.

Individual Mayoral Decisions taken since last meeting

- 6th March 2020 – MHCLG Rough Sleeping Initiative 2020/2021

Engagements and Meetings - 16 January 2020 to 11 March 2020

16 January 2020

- Civil Society Affairs, Israel Embassy
- Capital Strategy Board
- Grants determination Sub Committee
- Alliance of Tower Hamlets Community Organisation
- Ask the Mayor

17 January 2020

- London Council Labour
- Chief Executive
- LLDC Transition Meeting
- Mayor Glanville

18 January 2020

- Photo with Island Cllrs
- Jim Fitzpatrick Leaving Celebration

19 January 2020

- ITV Interview Liveable Streets

20 January 2020

- Slough Governance peer review
- Pre-Meet for New Town Hall Members Consultative Steering group
- PEG Briefing
- Engagement exercise briefing
- Chief Executive, Mayor and Borough Commander
- Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group
- Executive Committee
- Labour Group

21 January 2020

- Grass Cricket Pitch Meeting
- CLT
- Cllr Amina Ali
- Cllr Sirajul Islam
- Planning, Air Quality & Tackling Poverty Portfolio meeting
- Adults, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Meeting
- Granby Hall Launch

22 January 2020

- School Cuts Meeting
- Children, Schools and Young People Portfolio
- Planning meeting
- Traffic meeting
- Culture, Arts and Brexit Portfolio
- Cllr James King
- Mayors advisory meeting
- Parking Policy Review meeting
- Leopold Estate Cultural Association

23 January 2020

- London Community Agency Borough Breakfast with Mayor
- Chief Executive
- Civil Contingencies & Emergency Planning
- Housing Portfolio
- LLCA with Cllr Asma Islam
- Mayors Surgery

24 January 2020

- Slough Governance peer review team teleconference

26 January 2020

- Holocaust memorial service - ITV London interview
- Tower Hamlets Holocaust Memorial Day, Interfaith event, East London Central Synagogue

27 January 2020

- John Nicolson
- New Town Hall Members Consultative Steering Group Meeting
- Liveable Streets - Bethnal Green
- Pre meet - Regeneration Board
- Canary Wharf PLC

28 January 2020

- Times interview re. Westferry
- Poplar Harca
- Bow Ward Cllrs Meeting
- All Members Seminar: Member Workshop - Regeneration Delivery Plan
- Dan Jones
- Briefing on Youth Services Proposals
- Boundary Estate Follow-Up Meeting

29 January 2020

- Resources Portfolio Meeting
- Cabinet Pre meet
- Strategic Forward Planning

- Wapping Cabinet
- Mayors Political Meeting
- Mayors Advisory Board
- Cabinet

30 January 2020

- Performance & Budget Meeting QUARTER 3
- Chief Executive
- Performance & Budget Meeting QUARTER 3
- ATN /TV1 Interview – Community Language Service
- Principal of Ibrahim College
- Mayors Surgery

31 January 2020

- ITV London Interview

2 February 2020

- Slough

3 February 2020

- Slough Governance Peer review

4 February 2020

- Slough Governance Peer Review

5 February 2020

- Slough Governance Peer Review

6 February 2020

- Greater London Employment Forum Employers Side meeting on Apprenticeship
- Chief Executive
- Mayors Surgery
- ATN

7 February 2020

- BBC London Interview

8 February 2020

- London Policy Forum

9 February 2020

- LBTH Chinese / Lunar New Year celebrations
- Somali Youth Project

10 February 2020

- Ann Lucas THH
- Corporate Director Asmat Hussain

- Corporate Induction
- Strategy Performance meeting
- Property Portfolio meeting
- Susmita Sen Tower Hamlets Homes Chief Executive
- Performance and Budget QUARTER 3
- Cllr Val Whitehead
- Executive Committee
- Labour Group

11 February 2020

- London Councils Labour Group
- Leaders Committee
- Congress of Leaders with Mayor
- Labour Group Election
- Shadwell Liveable Street
- Mayors Board Crime and ASB

12 February 2020

- Work and Economic Growth Portfolio
- Adults, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio
- Grants Determination Sub Committee
- Environment Portfolio Meeting
- Parking Review
- Mayors Political Cabinet
- Mayors Advisory Board
- Performance Budget Meeting
- Community Safety and Equalities
- Wickes Lane Meeting Resident

13 February 2020

- CLF Board Meeting
- Regeneration Board Meeting
- Chief Executive
- Mayflower School
- NEU Meeting
- Mayors Surgery

14 February 2020

- Executive MSc in Cities Seminar
- Town Hall Project Board

15 February 2020

- Shadwell Liveable Streets drop-in session 2

17 February 2020

- Emmott Close (Ocean Regeneration Trust) meeting
- Shadwell Business Association meeting
- Billingsgate - CBRE Presentation

- Andreas Christophorou, Divisional Director of Communication
- Pre Meet City Fringe Area Board
- Performance & Budget Meeting Quarter 3
- Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) Borough update

18 February 2020

- Limehouse Mosque Meeting - Gill Street Site
- Cllr Asma Begum
- Jennifer Peter Divisional Director Planning and Building Control
- Performance & Budget Meeting Quarterly 3
- Youth Service Review

19 February 2020

- Mayor's Traffic Meeting
- Planning Meeting
- Cliche Offer
- Will Tuckley Chief Executive
- Councillor Sirajul Islam
- Pre-Council (Budget) Labour Group
- Budget Council

20 February 2020

- Greater London Employment Forum
- Office Opening
- Health Self-Awareness Events
- Mayor's Surgery

22 February 2020

- Big Clean up

24 February 2020

- Poplar Harca
- Planned Highway Improvements Programme Update
- Pre meet Citizens UK Follow up
- Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
- Liveable Streets - Wapping pre cabinet
- Enterprise team: Pop Up Business School Launch
- City Fringe Area Board
- Overview and Scrutiny
- Emmott Close

25 February 2020

- Apsana Begum MP
- VAWG Training
- Youth Assembly Tower Hamlets Citizen
- Tower Hamlets Labour LCF

26 February 2020

- Culture, Arts and Brexit Portfolio
- House of Lords Select Committee
- Planning, Air Quality & Tackling Poverty Portfolio
- Performance & Budget Meeting QUARTER 3
- Housing Portfolio
- Political Cabinet
- Mayors Advisory Board
- Cabinet
- Performance & Budget Meeting QUARTER 3

27 February 2020

- Liveable Streets Bethnal Green - Next steps pre meet
- Opening of Poplar Works with the Mayor of London
- Strategic Forward Planning Meeting
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Certificate handing Virginia and Columbia Primary schools Mini Mermaid Running Club 5km challenge
- No Place for Hate Pledge Award QMUL by the Mayor LBTH
- Mayors Surgery

27 February 2020

- School cuts campaign

3 March 2020

- Mayoral meeting for All Points East
- Meeting with London Legacy
- Housing meeting
- Catch up regarding Move to St Georges Town Hall
- Children, Schools & Young People Portfolio meeting
- BeHeard Availability

4 March 2020

- Resources Portfolio Meeting
- Pre meet - Regeneration Board
- Liveable Streets - Bethnal Green next steps
- Performance & Budget Meeting Quarter 3
- Community Safety & Equalities Portfolio Meeting
- Mayor Advisory Board
- Grants Determination Sub-Committee
- Berner Estate Meeting

5 March 2020

- Pensions & Westferry Printworks meeting with Councillor Kyrsten
- Lansbury Lodge meeting
- Meeting with Alison Charles
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley

- 'Topping out' ceremony at new Locksley A development
- Mayor's Surgery

8 March 2020

- Making Space – International Women's day
- International Women's day

9 March 2020

- Creative Enterprise Zone Conference
- Property Portfolio Meeting
- Barleymow TRA
- Tower Hamlets Arches
- Maltings and Brewster House resident meeting

10 March 2020

- Adults, health and wellbeing Portfolio meeting
- Corporate director Asmat Hussain
- Shortlisting for CD, Children and Culture
- Interview – Affordability on the Olympic park

11 March 2020

- Work and Economic Growth Portfolio meeting
- Mayors regeneration board
- Environment Portfolio meeting
- Mayors Political cabinet
- Mayors advisory board
- Pre Council Labour Group
- Council