

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL****HELD AT 7.15 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2020****ONLINE 'VIRTUAL' MEETING - [HTTPS://TOWERHAMLETS.PUBLIC-I.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME](https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home)****Members Present:**

Mayor John Biggs	Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Faroque Ahmed	Councillor Tarik Khan
Councillor Rajib Ahmed	Councillor James King
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	Councillor Eve McQuillan
Councillor Sufia Alam	Councillor Ayas Miah
Councillor Amina Ali	Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Shah Ameen	Councillor Puru Miah
Councillor Asma Begum	Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Rachel Blake	Councillor Victoria Obaze
Councillor Kevin Brady	Councillor Mohammed Pappu
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin	Councillor Kyrsten Perry
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	Councillor John Pierce
Councillor Shad Chowdhury	Councillor Leema Qureshi
Councillor Dipa Das	Councillor Zenith Rahman
Councillor David Edgar	Councillor Candida Ronald
Councillor Marc Francis	Councillor Dan Tomlinson
Councillor Peter Golds	Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Ehtasham Haque	Councillor Abdal Ullah
Councillor Danny Hassell	Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman
Councillor Mohammed Ahbab Hossain	Councillor Val Whitehead
Councillor Asma Islam	Councillor Bex White
Councillor Denise Jones	Councillor Andrew Wood

The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Victoria Obaze in the Chair

The Speaker of the Council opened the meeting by saying a few words about the impact of the Covid – 19 pandemic on the Borough. She wished to pay tribute to all those who have worked tirelessly to support key services to residents during this pandemic. The Speaker also expressed condolences to all those, including council staff, who have lost their lives through the horrible illness. The Council's thoughts and prayers were with their families at this difficult time.

The Council then observed a minutes silence to remember those affected

1. ELECTION OF SPEAKER

The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Victoria Obaze addressed the meeting about her year of office. She thanked Mayor John Biggs and Councillors for giving her the opportunity of being elected as the first black, female First Citizen of this borough.

She advised, that she had the honour of attending and supporting a range of events and activities promoting the Borough and bringing her own cultural heritage to her work. Examples included: a fundraising event for Black History Month, and participating in the Black Lives Matters campaign in the Borough. As a strong supporter of women's rights, she had also held an event for International Women's Day.

Other highlights included:

- Numerous awards ceremonies and celebrations showcasing the achievements and talent in the borough. They included events at the London Muslim Centre, the Chinese School, as well as music from the Tower Hamlets Arts and Music Education Service.
- Accompanying his Royal Highness, Esu Bwari to visit the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja in Nigeria. During the visit, she met a number of local dignitaries to discuss Tower Hamlets.
- A range of celebration events.
- Navy and Cadet events.
- Commemorative events including the Remembrance Day at Tower Hill and Martyr's Day at Altab Ali Park.
- Participating in National Democracy Week and chairing the Youth Council, providing great opportunities to promote involvement in the democratic process.

She was pleased to say that she held a very successful Charity Ball in December, including performances from the Sir John Cass and Redcoat School Steel Orchestra. She gave a special thankyou to all of the people and organisations who supported the fundraising events especially the sponsors for each.

Despite not being able to carry out all the planned fundraising, she still hoped to be able to make generous donations to her chosen charities. There were:

- the Alzheimer's Society Dementia Project
- Providence Row
- the Bangladeshi Parents and Carers Association.

She stated that had enjoyed every bit of her time in office and thanked the Council again for the opportunity.

Following the Speaker's address, Mayor John Biggs addressed the meeting. He thanked Councillor Victoria Obaze for her service, as Speaker of the Council over the year. It had been a great privilege to work with Councillor Obaze. She had served the Council with dignity and symbolises the Council's diversity. He also praised her honesty, her humility and her

community work. Councillor Peter Golds (Leader of the Conservative Group) echoed these sentiments, particularly welcoming the personal qualities that she brought to the role.

The following Councillors also paid tribute to Councillor Victoria Obaze, reflecting on her year in office:

- Councillor Sabina Akhtar
- Councillor Rabina Khan
- Councillor Asma Islam
- Councillor Rachel Blake
- Councillor Kahar Chowdhury
- Councillor Abdul Ullah

Referring to her appointment as the first black female Speaker, they considered that she had been an inspiration to many and a great role model. The Councillors also praised her humanity and compassion and that she had provided leadership, especially during this difficult time. She had brought people together and had worked hard to promote equalities and to help vulnerable people. They particularly valued the Speaker's role in supporting the Black Lives Matters movement, and for acting as a great advocate for women. Members also praised Councillor Obaze's approach to presiding over Full Council meetings in a fair and impartial way. She had also been an excellent ambassador for the Borough and her ward and had made residents proud.

She had been an outstanding speaker of the Council.

The Speaker then called for nominations to serve as Speaker of the Council for the coming year.

It was moved by Mayor John Biggs, and seconded by Councillor Asma Islam, and unanimously:

RESOLVED

1. That Councillor Mohammed Ahab Hossain, be elected to serve as Speaker of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Council until the Annual Council Meeting in May 2021.

The Mayor John Biggs and Councillor Asma Islam stated that they were delighted to support Councillor's Mohammed Ahab Hossain nomination as Speaker. The Mayor stated that Councillor Hossain was a strong advocate of community causes and he was proud of Councillor Hossain's achievements. He would make an excellent Speaker of the Council. Councillor Asma Islam echoed these points,

The Speaker advised that due to the pandemic and social distancing restrictions, the full ceremony would take place at a later date subject to any restrictions.

A short video played demonstrating the handover.

The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Mohammed Ahab Hossain in the Chair

The incoming Speaker, Councillor Mohammed Ahab Hossain thanked the Mayor and the Council for electing him as Speaker. He also thanked Councillor Victoria Obaze for all the wonderful work she had carried out on behalf of the borough over the past 17 months. He stressed the importance of working together especially over these difficult times. He would continue to work hard to represent the Borough to ensure everyone's voice was heard and to promote achievement and the Council's values.

He advised that he intended to announce his charities in due course. As a keen supporter of cultural, sports and youth organisations, it was his intention to ensure his choice of charities reflected this.

He would be accompanied by his wife Rohima Begum and his consorts: good friends Mohammed Sunahar Ali and Abdul Latif.

2. ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

The Speaker sought nominations to serve as Deputy Speaker of the Council for the forthcoming municipal year. It was moved by Mayor John Biggs, seconded by Councillor Dan Tomlinson, and:

RESOLVED

1. That Councillor Zenith Rahman be elected to serve as Deputy Speaker of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Council until the Annual Council meeting in May 2021.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Sirajul Islam
- Councillor Gabriella Salva-Macallan

Apologies for lateness were also received from Councillor Val Whitehead.

4. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

5. MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the ordinary Council Meeting held on 11 March 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and the Speaker be authorised to sign them accordingly

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

The Chief Executive addressed the meeting. He thanked the outgoing Speaker, Councillor Victoria Obaze and congratulated the new Speaker Councillor Mohammed Ahbab Hossain.

He made a number of announcements regarding:

- The Council's response to dealing with the pandemic. He thanked staff and partners for their continued efforts in tackling Covid - 19, but recognised that there were challenges ahead.
- Congratulated Councillor Dan Tomlinson who had recently married.
- He welcomed to the Council, James Thomas, as the Corporate Director, Children and Culture.
- With great sadness, reported on the death of two longstanding Council employees: Mike Marcus (Social Care, Senior Information Governance Officer) and Jim Glover (Income Operational and Verification Team Manager). The Council expressed condolences to their families at this difficult time.
- Congratulated the Council's Planning Department on winning awards at the Royal Town Planning Institute.
- He provided details of the forthcoming LGA peer review in November, future Ofsted Visits and a Special Educational and Needs disabilities Inspection.
- He was pleased to highlight that the Council was in the running to receive a number of awards at the Municipal Journal and the Local Government Chronical Virtual Awards.

7. MAYOR'S CABINET AND EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance setting out the Mayor's Cabinet appointments and other arrangements in respect of Executive Decision Making.

The recommendation was agreed.

RESOLVED

1. That the Mayor's Executive Decision Making scheme be noted.

8. PROPORTIONALITY AND ALLOCATION OF PLACES ON COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL 2020/21

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance proposing the establishment of the Council's committees for 2020/21 and setting out the review of proportionality and the allocation of places on those Committees. An amendment was noted whereby the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be listed with 9 Members with 8 for the Labour Group.

The recommendations were agreed.

RESOLVED

That the Council agree:

1. The review of proportionality as at Section 3 of the report and the allocation of seats on Committees and Panels for the Municipal Year 2020/21 as set out at paragraph 3.6 of the report.
2. To establish the Committees set out for the municipal year 2020/21, and for places to be allocated on those Committees, as set out at Paragraph 3.6 of the report.

9. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance regarding the appointment of members to the Council's Committees, and Chairs where appropriate, (including those established under item 8 above). The list of nominations were circulated in a supplementary agenda.

Following the receipt of two nominations for the position of Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Chair of the Audit Committee, the nominations were put to a recorded vote. For ease of reference, Members were asked to state their nominations for both positions at the same time.

Councillor James King was elected to the position of Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Val Whitehead was elected to the position of Chair of the Audit Committee. (The results of the vote are set out at the end of these minutes).

The recommendations in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

The Council agree to:

1. Appoint members and substitute members to the committees and sub-committees of the Council and other bodies for the municipal year 2020/21 as set out in the list of nominations circulated in the supplementary agenda;
2. Appoint the Chairs of Committees for 2020/21 as set out in the list of nominations circulated in the supplementary agenda subject to the appointment of:
 - Councillor James King as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - Councillor Val Whitehead as Chair of the Audit Committee
3. Agree that in relation to any unfilled places within the seats allocated to a particular political group, the Council note that the Corporate Director, Governance has delegated authority subsequently to agree the appointments to those places in accordance with nominations from the relevant political group.

10. COMMITTEE CALENDAR 2020/21

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance setting out a revised calendar of meetings for the Council, Committees and other meetings for the municipal year 2020/21.

At the request of Members, the Speaker agreed to explore with Officers the possibility of adding an additional Council meeting to the calendar in view of the recent break in meetings due to the special circumstances the Council had been operating under.

The recommendations in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

1. Approve the proposed calendar of meetings for the municipal year 2020/21 as set out in Appendix A including amended standard start times where appropriate.

2. Delegate to the Corporate Director, Governance the authority to agree meeting dates for any new Committees or Panels that are set up subsequent to this report being presented to Council, subject to appropriate consultation with Members.
3. To note that the Constitution provides for the Monitoring Officer to agree to cancel, amend a meeting or arrange new meetings where required, subject to the requirements of the Council Procedure Rules.
4. To note that the Council procedure rules agreed in relation to the operation of 'virtual' or 'remote' committee meetings (Section 26A of the Constitution) allow for these meeting locations and arrangements, including start time, to be adjusted as required including after the agenda has been published.

11. USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROCEDURES

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Governance setting out when Special Urgency provisions have been applied to Executive Key Decisions.

The recommendation was agreed.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report on the use of special urgency provisions in relation to Executive Key Decisions be noted

12. VIRTUAL COMMITTEE MEETING PROCEDURES

The Council considered the report of the General Purposes Committee setting out proposed Virtual Meeting Procedures.

The recommendations were agreed

RESOLVED

That the Council:

1. Endorse the Council's response to the requirement to hold Committee meetings 'virtually'.
2. Agree the proposed Virtual Meetings procedures set out at Appendix 1 to the report for inclusion in the Council's Constitution.

13. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS**13.1 Petition regarding Locate and reinvest money from sale of estate land**

Mohammad Rakib addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners, and responded to questions from Members. Mayor John Biggs then responded to the matters raised in the petition. He advised that he and colleagues had visited the estate and had met with the Tenants and Residents Association. He expressed a willingness to further engage with the Petitioners and the TRA to remedy the issues.

RESOLVED:

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

13.2 Petition regarding provide all households in Tower Hamlets with food waste recycling service.

Petition not presented due to the absence of the Petitioner

RESOLVED:

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

13.3 Petition regarding Re – Open Old Ford Road.

Petition not presented due to the absence of the Petitioner

RESOLVED:

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

13.4 Petition Debate - requesting that the Local Council stop using the blunt instrument of road closure to stop rat running through Tower Hamlets.

Anne Ambrose and Carlton Boulter addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and the Council then debated the matters raised by the petition.

Mayor John Biggs responded to the Petition. He advised that a detailed consultation exercise had been carried out and he was aware of the strength of feeling on the issues. He also noted the need to implement solutions that achieved the right balance between preventing rat running and allowing essential care use.

RESOLVED:

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

13.5 Petition Debate – Parking change in mini zones from 1st September.

Jakir Hussain addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and the Council then debated the matters raised by the petition.

During the debate, Councillor Andrew Wood **moved** and Councillor Rabina Khan **seconded** a motion (as set out below).

Motion:

This Council notes:

That in late July (the date is uncertain) a change to the parking rules was noticed on the Council website. It was announced that the changes would go live on the 1st September. It was initially unclear what was changing but it generated a lot of comment on social media. At the time there was no opportunity for residents and Councillors to ask questions about this change not least what had prompted it.

The Mayor later confirmed that he had chosen not to consult on this change during questions at the last Ask the Mayor event. It had not gone through any of the normal channels e.g. Cabinet, Forward Plan, allowing for comments and scrutiny. The changes are now live but for the first month nobody will be fined under these new rules but we assume that this will change tomorrow morning.

It resulted in three separate petitions. In late July, a Change.org petition was created which has attracted over 6,099 signatures (as at 27th September) of which over 900 have been validated as being from Tower Hamlets residents (Change.org does not require you to input an address when completing their petitions but can be added when first signing up to Change.org).

Cllr Puru Miah and Cllr Andrew Wood submitted two separate petitions which were combined into one petition on the Council website. This received 2,121 signatures between 29th July and 9th September 2020.

Of note 27,294 parking permits have been issued by the Council across Tower Hamlets – that depending on the size of extended families that perhaps 50,000 to 100,000 residents maybe affected by this change (clearly more work needs to be done to verify these numbers) as many families are reliant on intergenerational support, in particular the elderly. The latest statistics published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in 2019 showed that Tower Hamlets remains the local authority with the highest levels of income deprivation in the over 60s.

But there are only 24,537 on street parking places, a gap of 2,757 spaces (in addition a number of other people, for example in car free homes, will be parking at night and at weekends).

That of 16 mini-zones, 12 have more permits than parking spaces, which means that cars have to be driven elsewhere during the daytime for this to work (which contradicts measure to reduce car use).

That in some areas like Shadwell & the north-west of the Borough the problem is particularly acute with many more permits than spaces.

This Council further notes:

That subsequently to the Council petition starting, that point 1 was delivered as the Council did write again to all permit holders with more information including a map of the mini-zones.

That a briefing note was supplied to Councillors on the 26th August, five days before go-live.

This Council resolves:

1. That this change to mini-zones be reversed.
2. That if the Mayor does continue with this policy that the changes to the proposed mini-zones be put on hold (by not issuing any fixed penalty notices) until:
 - a. The national coronavirus alert level has been lowered to 2 or 1 (it is currently 4)
 - b. An independent Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out with a particular focus on the socio-economic inequalities impact.
 - c. That we talk to and consult residents on how street parking in Tower Hamlets should work in total, rather than making isolated incremental changes, for example by consulting on:
 - i. The hours of operation in particular whether they should be extended
 - ii. The boundaries of parking zones given new residential areas
 - iii. This proposed change to restricting all day parking to mini-zones
 - iv. Whether parking permits should be issued based on need rather than address
 - v. How we encourage electric vehicle car charging
 - vi. Car club parking
 - vii. Taxi stands & where taxis and private hire vehicles can wait for trade
 - viii. Car-free development rules
 - ix. How to access underutilised private car parks next to roads packed with cars
 - x. How long temporary COVID parking permits should be made available for
 - xi. Whether HMO's should be car free or not?

3. That in future Tower Hamlets Council commits itself to consulting on all such changes in advance with a clear programme of communication and advance notification.
4. That such consultations follow the guidance from the Consultation Institute detailed in the "All Members Seminar: Engagement and consultation Executive Briefing for members on the 16th September 2020"
5. On a separate note this process has highlighted weaknesses in the Council petition system especially related to the spacing and formatting of text that makes them hard to read. This should be resolved.

Mayor John Biggs proposed to refer the motion to the Cabinet for discussion. With the consent of the proposer and the Council, this was **agreed**.

Mayor John Biggs then responded to the Petition. He stated that he fully recognised the concerns of residents and welcomed a debate on the issues. He considered that the Council operated a very flexible parking control scheme, however it was important to take further action to tackle the serious issues with congestion and car pollution.

In view of the issues raised, he advised that he was willing to hold any action in abeyance pending further considered of the issues at an upcoming Cabinet meeting.

RESOLVED:

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

Procedure Motion

Councillor Peter Golds **moved** and Councillor Rabina Khan and Mayor John Biggs **seconded**, a procedural motion "that Procedure Rule 13.1 be suspended to enable an urgent motion regarding the Chinese Embassy to be considered.

Having considered the motion and received advice from the Monitoring Officer, the Speaker ruled that he did not consider that this matter was urgent enough to accept for this meeting. Members were welcome to present this matter at the next meeting should they wish.

14. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor presented his report to the Council. Following which:

Councillor Peter Golds, Leader of the Conservative Group, responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

The Mayor responded briefly

15. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

15.1 The Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Parenting Board.

RESOLVED

That the Council:

- 1 Note the contents of the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2019-20

16. TO NOTE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Procedural Motion – Guillotine procedure

The Speaker of the Council drew attention to Council Procedure Rule 9.1 regarding the conclusion of a meeting after a 3 hour time period. (The time being 10:15pm). In accordance with this rule, the Speaker stated the guillotine had now fallen. Therefore, the remaining item of business (item 16 Member Questions) would be put to the meeting without discussion. Written responses would be provided on the Council's agenda page on the website.

The meeting ended at 10.15 p.m.

Speaker of the Council

Vote on Nominations for Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Audit Committee

Nominations for Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
Councillor Andrew Wood and Councillor James King

Nominations for Chair of the Audit Committee:
Councillor Andrew Wood and Councillor Val Whitehead

COUNCILLOR	FOR Councillor James King Councillor Val Whitehouse	FOR Councillor Andrew Wood	ABSTAIN
Councillor Faroque Ahmed	x		
Councillor Rajib Ahmed	x		
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	x		
Councillor Sufia Alam	x		
Councillor Amina Ali	x		
Councillor Shah Ameen	x		
Councillor Asma Begum	x		
Councillor Rachel Blake	x		
Mayor John Biggs	x		
Councillor Kevin Brady	x		
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin	x		
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	x		
Councillor Shad Chowdhury	x		
Councillor Dipa Das	x		
Councillor David Edgar	x		
Councillor Marc Francis	x		
Councillor Peter Golds		x	
Councillor Ehtasham Haque	x		
Councillor Danny Hassell	x		

Councillor Mohammed Ahabab Hossain	x		
Councillor Asma Islam	x		
Councillor Denise Jones	x		
Councillor Rabina Khan		x	
Councillor Tarik Khan	x		
Councillor James King	x		
Councillor Eve McQuillan	x		
Councillor Ayas Miah	x		
Councillor Harun Miah			x
Councillor Puru Miah	x		
Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE	x		
Councillor Mohammed Pappu	x		
Councillor Kyrsten Perry	x		
Councillor John Pierce	x		
Councillor Leema Qureshi	x		
Councillor Zenith Rahman	x		
Councillor Candida Ronald	x		
Councillor Dan Tomlinson	x		
Councillor Helal Uddin	x		
Councillor Abdal Ullah	x		
Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman	x		
Councillor Bex White	x		
Councillor Andrew Wood		x	

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Question from Councillor Leema Qureshi

Can the cabinet member please provide an update on Test and Trace in the borough?

Response from Deputy Mayor for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Rachel Blake:

Like many areas some residents in Tower Hamlets have faced major challenges getting access to vital Covid-19 tests as a result of the national shortfall in testing capacity. We know how important these tests are to allowing residents to go about their daily life and we are committed to supporting residents to access a test if they have covid-19 symptoms.

Over recent weeks the Mayor and I have lobbied Government for additional resources for test and trace to ensure it is working effectively and to end the unacceptable delays our residents have faced.

As a result, the Department of Health and Social Care recently opened a test centre in the borough at Watney Market Idea Store and we expect another to open in Mile End very shortly. While this is positive, we still need to see an urgent increase in testing capacity in London and across the country.

The council is offering additional support to complement the national service by establishing a local team to contact covid-positive residents which NHS Test and Trace have struggled to reach. Local social prescribers, advocates and interpreters will contact cases to check they are self-isolating, and signpost them to any relevant services that can support them and their households to isolate.

Question from Councillor Peter Golds

Having cancelled Oktoberfest in Millwall Park this year due to the damage caused last year to the grass playing surface, will the Mayor confirm that following the evidence of violence, disorder and anti social behaviour at last years event from the Met Police,, he will not be hiring out Millwall Park to Oktoberfest in future years?

Response from Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit, Cllr Sabina Akhtar:

This council takes residents' concerns seriously which is why the recent licence review of this event resulted in a number of new conditions being imposed on the Oktoberfest that were designed to mitigate the issues of previous events.

These included a cap on number of people attending at 1,500, a condition CCTV must be in place and that no alcohol can be taken off the licenced area.

The organiser has indicated that they are able to adhere to these new conditions and may consider submitting a new format event to the council which we would consider like any other event. Given the current uncertainty around large scale events and the many unknown factors caused by the pandemic this clearly is unlikely to happen for some time.

If there was such an event a decision around its licensing would be taken, as you know, by the Council's Licencing Committee looking at the evidence in a quasi-

judicial capacity rather than by the Cabinet, however given the problems we have experienced previously, in my opinion it's difficult to see how a similar event would be welcomed without stringent measures in place to improve behaviour.

Question from Councillor Dipa Das

Could the cabinet member update members on the recently launched Tower Hamlets Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequalities Commission?

Response from Deputy Mayor for Community Safety, Youth and Equalities, Cllr Asma Begum:

Tower Hamlets' Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequalities Commission was successfully launched on 16th September. The commission will focus on areas of inequality faced by our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents.

Tower Hamlets is a diverse borough with a proud history of fighting racism and fascism as well as our continued commitment to diversity. However, recent events have once again shined a spotlight on racial inequality.

The Commission will engage and operate at the heart of Tower Hamlets' communities to hear people's lived experience and solutions, specifically Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women and young people who experience higher levels of inequality, work with institutions to advance and prioritise race equality and influence local, sub-regional and regional leaders.

This Commission has appointed a panel of expert commissioners from various institutions to lead the engagement and evidence gathering.

The three priority areas of focus are Community Leadership, Health and, Employment & Education with a report due to be published in early 2021 with clear and tangible actions we can all collectively take to address the inequality our communities face.

Question from Councillor Andrew Wood

What future (if any) do St Georges and Tiller road leisure centres have?

Response from Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit, Cllr Sabina Akhtar:

Thank you for your question Cllr Wood, I understand that similar questions were also submitted by Cllr Jones and Cllr Ullah with reference to St George's leisure centre as I know this is a matter of real importance to our residents.

We know that our leisure centres are an important service for residents. That is why on 29th July Cabinet made the decision to provide £774,000 in financial assistance to cover the leisure centre costs incurred during lockdown and permit a phased opening of the borough's leisure centres.

This phased opening was designed to maximise the leisure offer to local residents, whilst ensuring that the centres could be operated in a safe, Covid-secure manner and were financially viable once opened with reduced usage and income generation due to social distancing and other Covid-19 management measures.

The funding provided by Cabinet meant that Mile End, Poplar Baths, York Hall and John Orwell leisure centres were able to once again open their doors in a Covid-secure manner.

Unfortunately, St. George's and Tiller Leisure Centres cannot currently be operated in a Covid-secure, financially viable manner due to their configuration and significant operational subsidy required. The layout of the gyms and studio areas makes the implementation of 2m social distancing extremely problematic. In addition, both centres were operating at a considerable subsidy before lockdown, which would increase significantly given the reduction in customers due to Covid-19 social distancing.

We should also be clear that the delayed reopening of these centres is temporary, and no decision has yet been regarding their longer-term future.

Leisure centre operations during the pandemic are being regularly monitored and are under constant review to enable the Council and GLL to adapt to changing circumstances, including the potential impact of a second wave with further social restrictions, which are currently being implemented. We lobbied government to step in and help and I attach a letter to the Prime Minister and the reply we recently received.

A full review of our leisure offer and the ongoing impact of Covid-19 will be carried out ahead of the wider leisure contract retendering due in the coming years.

Question from Councillor Val Whitehead

What support has been made available to vulnerable residents throughout the Covid-19 pandemic?

Response from Deputy Mayor for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Rachel Blake:

The council has worked proactively in partnership with the NHS and other partners, services across the borough, and of course with local people, community and faith groups, to ensure that vulnerable residents have been supported during the pandemic. This vital work will continue and we are constantly reviewing and assessing our approach to ensure that residents receive the support they need.

Our response to Covid-19 covers a large number of areas, but some key ways we have supported vulnerable residents include:

- We continue to work closely with our care home and domiciliary care providers to ensure that access to guidance, information and training on infection control has been in place. Our care homes have had 'wrap around' support from NHS colleagues including GPs, hospital clinicians, mental health professionals and pharmacists to ensure that residents are getting the health care support they need; and carers within those services have had additional wellbeing support provided.
- We established a 'mutual aid' scheme for PPE (personal protective equipment) – supplying PPE to all carers who needed this within care homes, domiciliary care agencies, those shielding and those who purchase care through a direct payment or personal health budget. This also included advice and training on the correct use of PPE.
- The pandemic has exposed existing health inequalities. We have worked with partners to better understand the disproportionate impact of Covid-19

on Black, Asian and Minority communities, and we have lobbied the Government to take this more seriously. We have worked directly in partnership with community groups to reach the whole community to provide support and advice

- For residents in the borough who have a direct payment, we put in place a 10% contingency budget to support them. We are providing advice and support across the board working closely with our local disabled people's organisation, the local provider of direct payment support and others.
- For those residents who accessed support through our day centres or Linkage Plus centres, we re-focused the way that support was provided through use of doorstep visits and technology. Where needed, we adjusted packages of care to ensure needs were met.
- Over 7,200 people were contacted by a team of council, NHS and voluntary sector staff because they were extremely vulnerable and shielding. We provided food, medication, advice and social support when needed, with the support of volunteers and community organisations
- For residents being discharged from hospital, we worked with colleagues in the NHS to develop an 'integrated discharge hub' to ensure timely and smooth discharge, and we provided a number of extra interim placements for people who could not immediately return to their home or care home.
- We have worked with partners to better understand the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on BAME people, and we have lobbied the Government to take this more seriously.
- We continue to offer advice and support to residents on low incomes through our Tackling Poverty measures and our 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- We continue to lobby the Government for the funding that local authorities need to respond to the virus.

Throughout the pandemic, the community spirit in Tower Hamlets has really shone through, with residents and community groups working tirelessly to support one another. We will continue to support that effort, which will be more important than ever over the next few months as the number of cases rise and as we enter into the winter period in what will be an extremely challenging time for the country and for the borough.

Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed

What is the council's best estimate of the economic impact of Covid-19 on the borough, both in terms of the impact on the council's finances and the local economy generally?

Response from Cabinet Member for Work and Economic Growth, Cllr Motin Uz-Zaman:

As is the case across the whole country, the impact of the pandemic in Tower Hamlets has been significant.

The latest ONS data shows that on 31st July there were 47,600 Tower Hamlets residents receiving support through the government's furlough scheme which is equivalent to 29% of eligible residents. In addition, at the end of August there were 9,100 residents claiming self-employment support, which is 62% of those eligible.

The number of residents receiving of out of work benefits increased from 8,010 in January to 20,325 in August.

As the furlough scheme is withdrawn at the end of October and replaced by less generous employment support package announced by the chancellor last week, one of our concerns is the potential for a significant increase in unemployment, particularly as further restrictions have been implemented for the hospitality sector.

From the council's perspective, we have distributed government-allocated grants to 5,240 local business, worth a total value of over £76m. The council also distributed an additional £3m of discretionary funding to small businesses, including market traders, which missed out on the funding from central government mentioned above.

Work is still on-going to establish the precise impact of the pandemic on the council's finances, but clearly the impact has been severe as spending has increased and our income declined. Disappointingly, the government hasn't committed to reimbursing councils for all pandemic-related spending despite initial promises.

Question from Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan

Will the Mayor reconsider the implementation of the Tower Rewards scheme in light of the strength of opposition from residents, workers and UNISON, as well as the growing national concern around the use of Section 188?

Response from Mayor John Biggs:

The Tower Rewards package invests roughly £2.3 million more in pay and conditions.

The package increased pay and annual leave for many staff, introduced a new rent deposit scheme and standardised overtime and on call pay to ensure fairness. It updated special leave provisions, including to increase bereavement leave to up to 5 days and introduced new categories including for victims of domestic abuse.

The pay increases invested in roles which had fallen behind market median, including 'hard to fill' posts, like social workers. For example, the new pay scales mean a pay increase of £2,358 for an entry grade PO1 social worker.

Since January 2019 there has been regular engagement with unions, and directly with staff, to ensure that the views of our workforce are heard and responded to with over 1,000 staff engaged through email, face to face briefings and open Q&A sessions.

The feedback we received allowed management to make a wide range of amendments to the package at multiple stages in the process in response to concerns. For example, initial proposals on flexitime, working hours, redundancy notice, pay protection and progression were all withdrawn or significantly amended following feedback.

Alongside this, anyone adversely affected by any element of the changes will see their pay protected for two years or until increments in pay rises mitigate any loss and those already in restructures approved by CLT before the introduction will continue to benefit from the previous severance scheme.

It is important to recognise that over by July 1,400 staff had proactively opted into the contracts before they were implemented. This far exceeded the 656 Unison members who voted for strike action. I appreciate there remain some areas of concern and I remain disappointed that a collective agreement was not possible. Last week I once again wrote to Unison to offer to meet to discuss how we could address their remaining concerns about the implementation of the changes.

Withdrawing the contract is not however an option as it would mean another protracted process and would result in pay cuts, reductions in annual leave and other new benefits, which I am sure nobody wants to see.

Question from Councillor Marc Francis

Will the Lead Member for Public Realm Services provide an update on the Mayor's review of the Car Free Zone policy, including dates of the working group's meetings in the past 12 months and an indication when proposals for reform are likely to be brought forward?

Response from Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (job share), Cllr Dan Tomlinson:

Thank you for your question. There is not a specific working group on Car Free Zones or Car Free Developments. We keep all our parking policies under review and on this specific policy I expect that we will look at it again next year and I'd be happy to keep you informed on this.

Question from Councillor Kahar Chowdhury

What support has been provided to homeless individuals and families since the beginning of the pandemic and how many have received this support?

Response from Deputy Mayor for Housing, Cllr Sirajul Islam:

The council took significant steps to support homeless families and those sleeping rough and protect them from the threat of the pandemic.

During the height of the first lockdown until the end of July, 153 complex needs rough sleepers had been accommodated by the Council directly from the street into commercial hotels.

To enable practicing of social distancing and self-isolation as required, 111 single people who have been at risk of rough sleeping or who were claiming to be rough sleeping have also been accommodated by the Council in B&Bs and other temporary accommodation during Covid-19. These individuals have no priority need which means the Council owes them no housing duty and would not normally have accommodated them. As of August, a further 49 individuals had been accommodated who had no recourse to public funds.

The Council is committed to an the 'in-for-good' principle to ensure individuals taken in during Covid move-on in a planned co-ordinated way without the need to return to the streets. Rough sleepers are being supported to access suitable supported accommodation, or medium-term homes in the private rented sector for those with lower needs. The Council is also ensuring individuals with 'no recourse to public funds' have an offer of support.

Question from Councillor Kyrsten Perry

How many 'school streets' have been launched and what are the next steps?

Response from Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (job share), Cllr Dan Tomlinson:

Six School Street schemes are in the process of being launched in Tower Hamlets. These include:

- Ben Jonson Primary and Harry Roberts Nursery, Stepney Green – closed to motor vehicles (except residents) at drop-off and pick-up times.
- Blue Gate Fields Junior, Shadwell – new zebra crossing.
- Elizabeth Selby Infants and Lawdale Junior, Bethnal Green – Old Bethnal Green road closure to reduce through-traffic, traffic calming in Pollard Street to follow.
- English Martyrs Primary, Whitechapel – improved pavements, one-way system and pedestrian and cycle zone at drop-off and pick-up times.
- Globe Town Primary, Bethnal Green - closed to motor vehicles (except residents) at drop-off and pick-up times.
- Malmesbury Primary, Bow - closed to motor vehicles (except residents) at drop-off and pick-up times.

Five more schemes are now being taken into the implementation stage after already completing public consultation as part of other projects. Public consultation is being planned on a further 7 School Street Projects for October/November

Question from Councillor Rabina Khan

Tower Hamlets Children missed out on school for almost 5 months during Covid-19 lockdown and many could not access education online, unable to study at home due to cramped conditions and did not get the right support. Is the Mayor preparing a strategy to ensure that children educationally disadvantaged by the lockdown do not fall even further behind in their education and are given the support they need to fulfil their potential?

Response from Cabinet Member for Children and Schools, Cllr Danny Hassell:

We believe in giving Every Chance for Every Child and recognise the risk of our most vulnerable children falling behind under the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic.

In addition to the work of schools, within the council this concern was reflected in the establishment of Bronze level groups on socially vulnerable children, medically vulnerable children and on mental health.

The work in schools continues to be led and delivered through the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership whose staff are working closely with school leaders and practitioners to support pupil learning and to continue to narrow the gap.

This work has included supporting schools in delivering home learning strategies and enabling more children to have access to IT; supporting schools in responding to any gaps they have identified and constructing the curriculum to meet those gaps; schools are proactively taking steps to support pupils to catch up on missed lessons, as well as a focus on activity to promote physical and wellbeing.

The government has promised schools catch up funding, but this has not been distributed yet – once it is, THEP will support schools in maximising the impact of this additional resource and we'll work with teachers to ensure our children deliver their full potential.

Question from Councillor Harun Miah

In recent months, the rough sleepers in our borough are increasing in an alarm rate, particularly in and around Shadwell Overground and DLR.

Can the cabinet member tell us what is been done to eradicate this menace?

Response from Deputy Mayor for Housing, Cllr Sirajul Islam:

This administration does not see rough sleepers as a 'menace to be eradicated'. We understand that for many individuals, rough sleeping is a sign of people in crisis and in need of support.

At the beginning of the Covid 19 lockdown the number of people found rough sleeping increased across the capital. This was for a number of reasons including people suddenly losing their jobs, sudden evictions and family or friends no longer able to support them.

Our Rough Sleeping Team along with our commissioned Street Outreach Response Team have continued to work throughout the pandemic conducting outreach shifts, assessing new referrals, completing welfare checks, identifying support needs, and securing a pathway off the street for those found rough sleeping.

Not all individuals accept the offer of support and accommodation for various reasons including substance misuse issue, difficulty in trusting people due to past trauma and/or poor mental health. Our outreach team continue to work with these clients and encourage them to accept the support available.

Rough sleeping is not a crime and no one can be forced to accept accommodation however where anti-social behaviour (ASB) is identified alongside the rough sleeping, evidence is gathered and enforcement action are taken by the council and the police to reduce the ASB and encourage clients to accept support.

Shadwell DLR, Shadwell Overground station and the surrounding area has been identified as a hotspot and a number of actions have been taken. The location has been discussed at the Shadwell Ward Panel meeting and identified as one of the top three priorities for the local Safer Neighbourhood Team. The council's Rough Sleeping team and Street Outreach Response Team continue to work with the local Police Teams, British Transport Police, Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOS) and the local social housing teams around the Shadwell hotspot and individuals - obtaining evidence of the ASB and taking enforcement action where appropriate. Alongside the enforcement action clients are always offered and encouraged to accept support.