

Mayor's Report to Council

20th January 2021

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Key Events/Announcements

Covid-19: The national lockdown continues, and in addition to the normal testing sites in the borough we now also have rapid tests (Lateral Flow Tests) for people who don't have symptoms of Covid-19 but would still like to get tested, based at the Ecology Pavilion and at the Burcham Street Centre. These are available for key workers, those who can't work from home, and those with others in their household who still go out for work.

It is a perilous time for our community, and the NHS is under greater pressure than it has ever been before. The economic harm is of course massive too and will unfold more clearly over the coming months.

The rollout of vaccines is continuing, and the Government's aim is to vaccinate people in the first four priority groups by mid-February. The vaccination programme is managed centrally (by the NHS), and residents will be contacted directly about appointments. We are however looking at ways we can help the programme work better through local control/partnership, and we are lobbying for locally vulnerable groups and key workers to be better prioritised for vaccination.

With so many children now learning remotely, the impact of the 'digital divide' has grown even more. A Tower Hamlets Council survey of local headteachers has found that an estimated 10,000 additional devices are required in the borough to ensure that every child has the IT equipment they require to access schooling from home.

I've written to the Education Secretary to raise the impact that the lack of proper IT equipment and broadband is having on education, and to highlight the difficulties faced by children living in overcrowded accommodation where more than one child has to access learning at the same time.

Council budget: Our budget proposals were published before the Christmas break, and formally proposed at the Cabinet meeting on the 6th of this month.

The numbers are stark: Tower Hamlets Council has had to save £200m since 2010, and will have to save a further £30m by 2024.

It is a difficult budget – I believe it has been the hardest set of choices I've faced in my time in local government – as the impact of a decade of budget cuts, increasing demand, and Covid-19 have combined in a 'perfect storm'.

Despite the enormity of financial challenge we face, I'm very proud that we've been able to protect our Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which protects the poorest families from having to pay any council tax at all, and our universal Free School Meal (FSM) scheme which means that every single primary school child in Tower Hamlets is eligible for a FSM, not just some of them.

Royal Mail delays: A large number of residents have reported delays in receiving post from the Royal Mail, due to staff shortages. This is obviously a big concern and I have contacted the Chief Executive of Royal Mail to express my concerns.

Bangladesh at 50: 2021 is the 50th anniversary of the founding of Bangladesh. As part of our budget proposals we are proposing to allocate £50k of funding to mark the anniversary, and we are currently looking at ways that we can celebrate the occasion during 2021, although naturally the format of any celebrations will be shaped by whatever Covid-19 regulations are in place.

Liveable Streets: There is a petition debate on the agenda for this meeting, with a significant number of signatures. Debate on this issue, as with many traffic/parking discussions, can be very polarised but we clearly need a thoughtful discussion at our full council meeting about how we balance differing points of view as well as how we tackle dangerously poor air quality, invest in our neighbourhoods, and meet our 2018 manifesto commitment.

Public Spaces Protection Order – nitrous oxide: We are consulting on proposals to introduce a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in the borough, to tackle the recreational use of nitrous oxide and the resulting ASB. This is something that is raised frequently by residents, and people can take part in the consultation online.

Domestic abuse support service: Solace, the domestic and sexual violence charity, has now been appointed to provide support to those affected by domestic abuse in the borough. The new service, TH SASS (Solace Advocacy and Support Service) launched on the 4th of this month with a team of independent DV advocates. Residents can access the service via phone/email. This is a vital service, particularly given the alarming increase in DV during the pandemic.

John Biggs
Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Individual Mayoral Decisions taken since last meeting

- 1st December 2020: Christmas provision for free school meals eligible children:
<https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=434&MId=11973&Ver=4>

Mayor's engagements and meetings

Below is a summary of the Mayor's main engagements and meetings from 18th November 2020 to 20th January 2021. Please note that most of these meetings were held digitally as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

20 November 2020

- Cllr. Rachel Blake

21 November 2020

- Cllr. Mufeedah Bustin and Resident

23 November 2020

- Head of Mayor's Office
- Pre-Meet Dido Harding
- Dido Harding re: Test and Trace

- NEL ICS Leaders Follow-up meeting
- Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group
- TFL Development of Poplar DLR Station
- Finance Presentation
- Proposed Scheme Stifford Centre
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee

24 November 2020

- Whitechapel Crossrail and TFL Meeting
- UNISON
- Mayor's casework surgery
- Meeting with Resident
- Ashington House Development and Bangladeshi Elders Group
- Strategic Forward Planning Meeting
- London Councils Introduction Meeting With Strategic Lead for Enterprise
- Children and Schools Portfolio Meeting
- Civil Contingencies & Emergency Planning Portfolio Meeting
- Ask the Mayor

25 November 2020

- Cabinet Pre-meet
- Planning and Social Inclusion Portfolio Meeting
- MAB
- Cabinet

26 November 2020

- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Apsana Begum MP
- Strategy and Equalities Portfolio Meeting
- London Covid-19 Local Tiering Arrangements
- Aberfeldy New Master Plan
- Canary Wharf College Club Media Interview
- Channel S Interview
- Grants Determination Sub-Committee
- New Providence Wharf Leaseholders & Residents Association

27 November 2020

- Cllr. Rachel Blake
- London Councils Labour Group Meeting
- NE London Covid 19
- MTFS Changes and Labour Group

28 November 2020

- Watts Grove Residents

30 November 2020

- Chief Executive of Lambeth Council
- Head of Mayor's Office

- Filming World Aids Day Video
- Mayor Update Investors In People
- Chief Executive THH Susmita Sen
- Marcus Barnett Met Police
- Housing Portfolio Meeting
- Labour Group Budget Meeting

01 December 2020

- Investors In People Assessment Interview
- Pre-Meet for Poplar HARCA
- Quarterly Meeting with Poplar HARCA
- Group Budget feedback and Planning
- Regeneration Portfolio Meeting
- Covid 19-NE London Leaders and Mayors Meetings
- Community Safety and Youth Portfolio Meeting

02 December 2020

- Resources Portfolio Meeting
- Mayors Political Cabinet
- MAB
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley

03 December 2020

- Mayor's casework surgery
- Ann Lucas, Chair of Tower Hamlets Homes
- Apasen's International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- Raines House
- Leaside Partnership Board

04 December 2020

- Cllr Rachel Blake
- Budget Paper Review

07 December 2020

- Executive Committee
- Labour Group Budget Meeting 2

08 December 2020

- Mayor's casework surgery
- London Councils Labour Group
- London Councils Leaders Committee
- Head of Mayor's Office
- Covid 19 Data briefing by Secretary of State for Health
- Culture, Arts & Brexit Portfolio Meeting
- Covid 19 Local Engagement Board

09 December 2020

- Work & Economic Development Portfolio Meeting
- Cllr. Sirajul Islam
- Pre-Meet Billingsgate
- Catherine McGuinness Billingsgate Update
- Environment & Public Realm Portfolio Meeting
- Executive MSc in Cities - 'Borders and Boundaries' Session
- MAB

10 December 2020

- Adults Health & Well-Being Portfolio Meeting
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Covid 19-NE Leaders and Mayors Meeting
- Corporate Director of PLACE Ann Sutcliffe
- NEL shadow ICS Board Workshop
- Liveable Streets Barnet Grove

11 December 2020

- TFL Briefing London Labour
- ELBA Toy Appeal Photoshoot
- Cllr. Rachel Blake
- The Hubs Video Message Recording

13 December 2020

- Labour Group Meeting

14 December 2020

- Head of Mayor's Office
- Corporate Induction
- London Councils Leaders Meeting
- Wapping Bus Gate Exemption
- Pre-Meet RSE Meeting
- Covid 19-NE London Leaders and Mayors Meeting
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee

15 December 2020

- Cllr Asma Begum
- Mayor's casework surgery
- Clarion Meeting
- Rushanara Ali MP
- Menorah lighting at Mulberry Place
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Labour Group Budget Meeting 3

16 December 2020

- Cllr John Pierce
- Planning Meeting
- Mayor's Political Cabinet
- MAB

- Cabinet
- 50th Victory Day of Bangladesh Channel S online event

17 December 2020

- Apsana Begum MP

18 December 2020

- CLF Director Interview
- MTFS Update with Corporate Director Kevin Bartle

21 December 2020

- Head of Mayor's Office
- Place Campaign
- CLF Director Interview
- Communications Portfolio Meeting
- Covid 19 Update Meeting
- Weekly Briefing for Leaders and Chief Executives on Covid 19

22 December 2020

- East London Mosque & Ashadaabi Centre
- Cllr Rachel Blake
- Mayor's casework surgery
- Cllr Sirajul Islam
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley

23 December 2020

- Faith leaders conference call
- John Denham Building, St Clements Hospital

05 January 2021

- Head of Mayor's Office
- MHCLG Ministerial briefing
- Covid 19 Political Leadership

06 January 2021

- Resources Portfolio Meeting
- Partnership Executive Group Agenda Discussion
- Whitechapel Bell Foundry
- Cabinet Pre-meet
- Assets/Property Portfolio Meeting
- MAB
- Cabinet

07 January 2021

- Covid 19 NE London Leaders and Mayors Meeting
- Rushanara Ali MP
- VCS Organisations
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Ballymore Group with Lord Stephen Greenhalgh
- Queen Mary University and London Citizens
- Budget Venue Charges

08 January 2021

- Covid 19 NE London Leaders and Mayors Meeting
- Cllr Rachel Blake
- London Councils Labour Group Meeting

11 January 2021

- Head of Mayor's Office
- TH Partnership Executive Group Meeting
- Chief Executive THH Susmita Sen
- Faith Conference
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee

12 January 2021

- Video Recording for Holocaust Memorial Day
- Liveable Streets Bow Pre-Meet
- Idea Stores Consultation update
- Future For London
- Head of External Communications introduction chat
- Cllr Kevin Brady
- Ask the Mayor-Liveable Streets Bow

13 January 2021

- Environment & Public Realm Portfolio Meeting
- Transforming Homelessness Services Workshop
- Political Cabinet
- MAB
- MHCLG Ministerial Update
- UNISON Pre-Meet

14 January 2021

- Covid 19 NE London Leaders and Mayors Meeting
- Mayor's casework surgery
- Capital Strategy Board
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Culture, Arts & Brexit Portfolio Meeting
- Covid 19 Local Engagement Board

15 January 2021

- Cllr Rachel Blake
- LGA Commercial Mindset Zoom Masterclass

- Grants Meeting, Cllr. Motin Uz Zaman

18 January 2021

- Head of Mayor's Office
- Mayor's casework surgery
- UNISON Meeting
- Regeneration Board Pre-Meet
- Executive Committee
- Labour Group

19 January 2021

- Head of Mayor's Office
- Cllr Asma Begum
- Mayor's Regeneration Board
- Borough Commander Marcus Barnett, Met Police
- Liveable Streets Brick Lane

20 January 2021

- Work and Economic Growth Portfolio Meeting
- Planning Meeting
- Planning & Social Inclusion Portfolio Meeting
- Pre-Council Labour Group
- Council Meeting