

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL****HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2021****THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG****Members Present:**

Mayor John Biggs*	Councillor Asma Islam
Councillor Faroque Ahmed	Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Kabir Ahmed*	Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Rajib Ahmed*	Councillor Tarik Khan*
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	Councillor Eve McQuillan
Councillor Amina Ali	Councillor Ayas Miah
Councillor Shah Ameen	Councillor Harun Miah*
Councillor Asma Begum	Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE*
Councillor Rachel Blake	Councillor Victoria Obaze*
Councillor Kevin Brady	Councillor Mohammed Pappu
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin*	Councillor Leema Qureshi
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury*	Councillor Zenith Rahman*
Councillor Shad Chowdhury	Councillor Candida Ronald
Councillor Dipa Das*	Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan*
Councillor David Edgar*	Councillor Dan Tomlinson*
Councillor Marc Francis*	Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Peter Golds*	Councillor Abdal Ullah
Councillor Ehtasham Haque	Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman*
Councillor Danny Hassell	Councillor Val Whitehead
Councillor Mohammed Ahabab Hossain*	Councillor Andrew Wood*

*Councillors present in person in the Council Chamber.
(Remaining Councillors attended from remote locations).

**The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Mohammed Ahabab Hossain in
the Chair**

The Speaker of the Council provided his update to the Council. He firstly welcomed to the Council meeting, Councillor Kabir Ahmed following his recent election at the Weavers Ward by-election.

He was pleased to say that he had the honour of hosting and attending a number of events. These included:

- The launch of the film festival as part of the programme of activities for the 50th Anniversary of Bangladesh.

- Hosting his first in person civic event to celebrate this occasion in July – featuring an afternoon and evening of film, songs, dancing and food celebrating Bangladesh.
- Attending community fun days in Bancroft and on the Isle of Dogs, as well as All Points East in Victoria Park.
- Several other community events to celebrate achievements. The Speaker thanked everyone in the community that had been working hard, to provide help where needed in this difficult times.

Looking forward, the Freedom of the Borough ceremony would be taking place in October, for only the second time in over 20 years, to give the highest honour to people who have given many years of service to Tower Hamlets.

Turning to some sad news – the Speaker expressed regret about the recent death of the former Weavers Ward and Liberal Democrat Councillor, Tim O'Flaherty. He would be remembered as a good Councillor and a nice person, who served as a Councillor whilst disabled.

The Council were also deeply saddened by the loss of another innocent young woman, Ms Sabina Nessa a school teacher, on our streets.

The Council observed a minutes silence to remember everyone that had been affected by this and had lost their lives in similar circumstances.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Sufia Alam (maternity leave)
- Councillor Rabina Khan
- Councillor James King
- Councillor Puru Miah
- Councillor Krysten Perry and
- Councillor Bex White

Apologies for lateness were received on behalf of Councillor Denise Jones.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

The Monitoring Officer report that under paragraph 32, of the Code of Conduct for Members, she had granted a dispensation to all Councillors in relation to Agenda item 12.3 (Motion on Local Government pay to council).

As a result of this, Councillors with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in this item did not need to declare this and would be able to stay in the meeting room, participate in the discussion and vote on the item. (This motion was not considered)

Councillor Ayas Miah declared a Non - Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 11.16, Member Question regarding the COVID restart grants. This was on the basis that he and other family Members owned businesses in the Borough, but they had not applied for a Covid restart grant.

Councillor David Edgar declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 12.2, Motion regarding One Housing Group Takeover by Riverside Housing Association. This was on the basis that a family member had a leasehold property with the One Housing Group. He indicated that he would leave the meeting for the consideration of this item.

Councillor Candida Ronald declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda item 12.2 , Motion regarding One Housing Group Takeover by Riverside Housing Association. This was on the basis that Councillor Ronald was a tenant of the One Housing Group. She indicated that she would leave the meeting for the consideration of this item.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 21st July 2021 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 Chief Executive provided an update regarding the following issues:

- Covid - 19 and Vaccines. He was pleased to report on the falling case numbers in the Borough. It now had one of the lowest infection rates in London. Further progress had also been made with the roll out of the vaccine programme in the community and in schools. In addition, a booster, flu and evergreen vaccination programme was in place.
- The Council had hosted the postponed visit by the Local Government Association Peer Review Team. A report would be published in due course
- Staffing update. Amanda Marcus, Director of Workforce, Occupational Development & Business Support was leaving the Council to re-join the NHS. Ali Littlewood would be joining on 4th October to cover the role. Richard Baldwin, Director of Supporting Families, would be leaving the Council to take up a new post of Director of Children's Services in Bromley. He thanked both for all their hard work. The action to recruit to these posts was well in advance.
- Emergency matters. The Council had been approached by Clarion Housing regarding the evacuation of Clare House in Bow due to concerns over building safety.
- The Council was in a strong position regarding fuel supplies, but it was noted that staff, and those that deliver services on behalf of the Council, have been affected.

- Education success. He congratulation students Fahim Miah and Saqif Chowdhury who have recently been accepted to study History at Oxford and Cambridge respectively and start in October.

5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

5.1 Petition regarding Antisocial behaviour on Bishops Way.

Carole Boletti addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners and responded to questions from Members. Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Community Safety then responded to the matters raised in the petition. He stated that he was sorry to hear about the Petitioner's personal experiences with ASB that she had outlined. He reassured the Petitioner that the Council's ASB team, the Police and relevant agencies were aware of these problems. They have undertaken a range of steps to address the problems. This included issuing a Community Protection Notice Warning with a view to issuing a closure order.

RESOLVED:

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

5.2 Petition regarding the pedestrianisation of Brick Lane and Liveable Streets

Matthew Hewitt 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.

The Mayor welcomed the residents contribution, and also stated that he was also aware of the divisions in the community in relation to traffic reduction schemes across London.

In view of this, the Council will continue to review the options for Brick Lane, and to carry out further consultation and engagement where necessary.

A more detailed announcement will be made in the next couple of days.

RESOLVED

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

6. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor presented his report to the Council.

The Opposition Group Leader's then responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

- Councillor Peter Golds, Leader of the Conservative Group,
- Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Leader of the Aspire Group.

The Mayor provided concluding remarks.

7. ADMINISTRATION MOTION DEBATE

Councillor Mufeedah Bustin **moved** and Councillor Motin Uz – Zaman **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda.

Councillor Andrew Wood **moved** and Councillor Peter Golds **seconded** the following amendment to the motion as set out in the supplementary agenda:

Amendments underlined.

This council notes:

1. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) intends to close the JobCentre Plus branch based at Dod Street, Poplar.
2. That the reasons for the closure are due to the landlord not renewing the lease due to the intended redevelopment of the site for much needed new housing.
3. The submission in late 2019 of planning application PA/20/00123/A1 for 13-15 Dod Street to build an 8-storey residential building with 84 homes where the single storey job centre is now (plus the 3-storey office building behind it)
4. The Applicant engaged in four meetings with the Council's planning team. The pre-application meetings were held on 12th July 2019, 27th September 2019, and 22nd November 2019.
5. That on the 5th November 2020 the Development Committee voted unanimously to approve the application to re-develop the site. That in the Committee Report it said "The current occupiers are due to vacate the site and relocate their services to Mansell Street, E1"
6. That on the 1st November 2019 the Council approved an earlier permitted development application for 35 homes on this site.
7. That in the DWP Estates Proposals 26.01.2017 v1.0 it was proposed to retain Dod Street as well as Mansell Street job centres in Tower Hamlets plus centres in Hackney, Stratford, and Canning Town.
8. That the 29th August 2019 update on job centre closures in 2018 by the DWP did not include any closures in London but did mention co-location with local authorities as a way of finding new premises.

9. That in 2021 the DWP set up temporary jobcentres to deal with increased demand including at 100 Leman Street, this is to provide more space for safe meetings
10. The failure since 2019 to identify and then offer an alternative location to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in one of the many planning applications to go through LBTH
11. That the possibility of offering the DWP space in the new Town Hall at centre of Whitechapel has never been raised with Town Hall Steering Group
12. That Tower Hamlets for the 2nd year running has missed the housing delivery targets set by the Mayor of London as a result of which there is now greater pressures on us to deliver new housing.
13. The ~~closure~~ transfer of this branch will result in longer travel times for some residents needing ~~of~~ a critical layer of support for our residents in Tower Hamlets, at a time when Universal Credit uplift ends, the furlough scheme closes, and the government imposes an increase in National Insurance.
14. The central position of the Dod Street branch is located close to some of the areas of highest deprivation in our borough: the ~~closure~~ transfer ~~will~~ may result in increased deprivation through residents not claiming the benefit support that they are entitled to.
15. That while Dod Street has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) of 4 (where 6B is best and 1 worst) due to its bus connections on Burdett Road it is not that well connected to the DLR or Underground network. We should aim for it to be relocated to an area with a higher PTAL and which is more prominently located and visible.
16. That access to welfare support is becoming increasingly digitised and those in most need of support ~~are~~ maybe less likely to have the digital capability to access that support.
17. That LBTH has itself closed many opportunities for face-to-face support or over the phone and moved services online

This council believes:

1. The DWP's JobCentre Plus branches provide vital face-to-face support to residents who are unemployed and/or are claiming benefit support.
2. Within Tower Hamlets, there are just 3 JobCentre Plus branches, ~~both~~ all three in Poplar & Limehouse constituency, which provide vital support for many Tower Hamlets residents.
3. The recently published "Poverty Review" highlighted that residents were not always aware of the benefit support available to them, and that there is high correlation between illiteracy, digital exclusion and poverty. Face to face advice is often vital for many residents to understand and access the support they need.

4. That provision of employment and welfare support can be conducted in a variety of buildings and places that are accessible and welcoming to residents, and closer working between the DWP, council frontline services, and the borough's advice centres, can only benefit our residents.

This council resolves:

1. To ask the Mayor and Lead Member to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Thérèse Coffey MP and the Minister for Employment Mims Davies MP to:
 1. To welcome the redevelopment of the centre for housing and
 2. ~~express concern at the closure of Dod Street JobCentre Plus,~~
and
 3. offer support in finding alternative suitable accommodation perhaps including at the new Town Hall
2. To call on our local MPs to raise our concerns with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the failure since early 2019 of LBTH and the DWP to find an alternative location.

Following debate, the amendment moved by Councillor Andrew Wood was put to a vote and was **defeated**.

The substantive motion was put to a vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED:

This council notes:

1. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) intends to close the JobCentre Plus branch based at Dod Street, Poplar.
2. That the reasons for the closure are due to the landlord not renewing the lease.
3. The closure of this branch will result in the removal of a critical layer of support for our residents in Tower Hamlets, at a time when Universal Credit uplift ends, the furlough scheme closes, and the government imposes an increase in National Insurance.
4. The central position of the Dod Street branch is located close to some of the areas of highest deprivation in our borough: the closure will result in increased deprivation through residents not claiming the benefit support that they are entitled to.
5. That access to welfare support is becoming increasingly digitised and those in most need of support are less likely to have the digital capability to access that support.

This council believes:

1. The DWP's JobCentre Plus branches provide vital face-to-face support to residents who are unemployed and/or are claiming benefit support.
2. Within Tower Hamlets, there are just 2 JobCentre Plus branches, both in Poplar & Limehouse constituency, which provide vital support for many Tower Hamlets residents.
3. The recently published "Poverty Review" highlighted that residents were not always aware of the benefit support available to them, and that there is high correlation between illiteracy, digital exclusion and poverty. Face to face advice is often vital for many residents to understand and access the support they need.
4. That provision of employment and welfare support can be conducted in a variety of buildings and places that are accessible and welcoming to residents, and closer working between the DWP, council frontline services, and the borough's advice centres, can only benefit our residents.

This council resolves:

1. To ask the Mayor and Lead Member to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Thérèse Coffey MP and the Minister for Employment Mims Davies MP to:
 - a. express concern at the closure of Dod Street JobCentre Plus, and
 - b. offer support in finding alternative suitable accommodation
2. To call on our local MPs to raise our concerns with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

8. OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE

Councillor Andrew Wood **moved** and Councillor Peter Golds **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda.

The motion was put to a vote and was **defeated**.

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

There were none

10. OTHER BUSINESS

10.1 Re-appointment of Standards Advisory Committee Co-Opted Members

The Council considered the report of the Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer regarding the appointment of Independent Co-Opted Members of the Standards Advisory Committee

RESOLVED:

1. Agree the re-appointment of the following Independent Co-Opted Members of the Standards Advisory Committee for a new four-year

term ending on 30 September 2025:

- Nafisa Adam
- Fiona Browne
- Mike Houston
- John Pulford MBE

10.2 Appointment of the Chair of the Strategic Development Committee

The Council considered the report.

Councillor Tarik Khan **moved** and Mayor John Biggs **seconded** the following:

- A nomination for the position of the Chair of the Strategic Development Committee.
- An additional recommendation to the report regarding the appointment of a Mayoral Advisor and a nomination to that position.

RESOLVED:

1. That Councillor Kevin Brady be appointed as Chair of the Strategic Development Committee for the remainder of the 2021-22 municipal year
2. That Councillor Eve McQuillan be appointed to act as a Mayoral Advisor until the point that Councillor Sufia Alam returns from maternity leave on 31st January 2022.

10.3 Proportionality and Allocation of Places on Committees of the Council

The Council considered the report of the Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer regarding the Proportionality and Allocation of Places on Committees of the Council

The Council also noted the tabled allocations for opposition Members, published on the Council's website in the supplementary agenda.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the review of proportionality as at Section 3 of the report and the allocation of seats on Committees and Sub-Committees for the Municipal Year 2021/22 as set out at paragraph 3.6 of the report.
2. To note the Committees set out for the municipal year 2021/22 listed in paragraph 3.6 as agreed at the Annual Council meeting held on Wednesday 19 May 2021.
3. Agree the changes to the memberships as set out in the tabled allocations for opposition Members, and published in the supplementary agenda.

4. Agree that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to approve the appointment of Councillors required to fill positions that fall vacant during the municipal year in line with the proportionality arrangements set out in this report.
5. Agree that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to approve the appointment of ungrouped Councillors to any committee places not allocated by the Council to a political group, after consultation with those Councillors and the Speaker of the Council.
6. Agree that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and General Purposes Committee should now consider any necessary proportionality changes to their sub-committees following this report.

10.4 Appointment of Political Advisors

The Council considered the report of the Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer regarding the appointment of political advisors.

Councillor Tarik Khan **moved** and Mayor John Biggs **seconded** a proposal that the existing second political advisor post should be retained by the Conservative Group.

RESOLVED:

1. That the existing second political advisor post should be retained by the Conservative Group.

11. 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.

11.1 Question from Councillor Tarik Khan:

Will the Mayor provide an update on the Liveable Streets programme?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

I continue to support the principles behind Liveable Streets for providing better, safer, calmer streets, reduce rat run traffic and to improve air quality and the street environment. However, the Administration now needs to take time to reflect on the impact of the scheme on residents, so the decision has been taken to pause the programme. The Council intended to complete the existing programmes in the seven areas, where the consultation had taken place, subject to undertaking any amendments necessary in light of the consultation or pause. The Council also remained committed to carrying out it's Schools Streets programme.

No supplementary question was asked.

11.2 Question from Councillor Kabir Ahmed:

Can the Mayor give a break down of how much money has been spent to date on his liveable streets project? (This includes costs for; Consultants/ so called consultation, Planters, Transport costs, Council Officer time/cost, Any other cost for this project)

Response of Mayor Biggs:

Since the introduction of the programme, several years ago, £6.9 million had been spent on the project, from capital resources not from revenue resources. Most of which had been spent on physical works. As the programme was concluded, an even bigger amount will be spent on physical works. I wish to emphasise that the aims of the programme were not just about closing roads but about improving the streets scene, cycle and motorist provision and providing pocket parks, as well as other services. It represented a good investment in the public realm.

Supplementary question from Councillor Kabir Ahmed:

Can the Mayor clarify the reasons for leaving the planters on Virginian Road?

Mayor Biggs response to supplementary question:

They were placed there at a time when the closure was due to go ahead. This decision now forms part of the review. It was unlikely that this closure would take place as intended. In that case, they will need to be removed.

11.3 Question from Councillor Leema Qureshi:

How is the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund being used?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

The Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund will help initiate the Borough's economic and social recovery from Covid 19. Nearly £3m of grants has been committed. The main heading for the funding comprised:

- Community led recovery – almost £700,000.
- Healthy recovery – almost £900,000.
- Community recognised and celebrated - £44,500
- Economic recovery programme - £500,000

It will provide support in the areas where Government programmes had failed to cover.

It offers good value and will help raise the capacity of the Borough and support the community, helping us ease our way out of a crisis.

No supplementary question was asked.

11.4 Question from Councillor Peter Golds:

Will the Mayor outline his plan to mitigate the anti-social behaviour at St Andrews Wharf, Masthouse Terrace and the Basketball Area of Millwall Park which is increasingly blighting the peace of local residents?

Response of Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Community Safety:

The skate park at St Andrews Wharf, Masthouse Terrace is currently the subject of proactive monitoring by the Police Task Force and Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers. The Council's Youth Services are also ensuring that the facilities at this location are now being utilised by young people, without causing a detrimental affect on the community. While the proactive action by the Police and the Community Safety resource has had a positive affect, it is likely that ASB will continue to be a problem at this location, whilst it remains insecure. We are working with partners to explore solutions to secure this area.

Multi agency action between Parks and Highways took place in June in relation to Millwall Park and the underpass. In relation to light pollution contributing to the situation, we will revisit this and the ASB that has been occurring of late. A new ASB case will be opened to investigate ongoing issues in this area. We are liaising with TfL regarding changes to the position of DLR track lighting and the potential installation of a timer function.

Supplementary question from Councillor Peter Golds:

Can the Council look at locking the gates at dusk at St Andrews Wharf, to deal with the problems with ASB that are ruining the residents quality of life on a 24 hour 7 days a week basis?

Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to supplementary question:

As highlighted in my answer, the Council were working with partners to find solutions in this area and I can communicate this back to you. I am very happy to visit this particular area at St Andrews Wharf and I can arrange this.

11.5 Question from Councillor Eve McQuillan:

What is the council's response to the Government's announcement on social care, and how much has the council itself invested in social care in 2020/21?

Response of Councillor Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor & Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing:

The Council is deeply disappointed by this Government's response to what is now a social care crisis. In particularly, it's attempts to force the costs on the Council and hard working people.

I wish to thank all the hardworking people working in our care services – from the social workers to the unpaid workers, who support some of the most vulnerable residents.

In direct answer to your question, the Council works with nearly 4000 people and has spent £98m on supporting people in relation to social care.

Supplementary question from Councillor Eve McQuillan:

Can you comment on the impact of a national social care service for residents and careers in Tower Hamlets?

Councillor Rachel Blake's response to supplementary question:

I believe that only a locally secured social care service, supported by a national care service that recognises diversity of local needs, will really be able to support the vulnerable people in Tower Hamlets. This will take a national strategy and only a Labour Government has the vision to deliver this

11.6 Question from Councillor Harun Miah:

According to the THLP website the Labour Mayor and Cllrs are 'fighting for Cleaner, safer and fair for Tower Hamlets'

- Rubbish not being collected-failed
- Crime gone up - failed
- Some roads blocked others open, how is that fair - failed

Can the Mayor explain who is politically responsible for delivering a cleaner, safer and fair Tower Hamlets?

Response of Mayor John Biggs:

The Council regularly monitors the performance of the waste services. However, during the Covid period, there had been difficulties, sometime caused by, for example, car parking on certain estates which makes it difficult for the vehicles to collect the waste.

Crime levels in the Borough had gone down during the pandemic. But there is a challenge now with the lifting of the restrictions. We are not responsible for crime but we continue to work with the Police in relation to crime.

The subject of road closures has already been discussed during the opposition motion debate.

It is the responsibility of the Administration to deliver a cleaner, safer and fair Tower Hamlets. We have a far better record in securing this, compared to the previous Administration.

No supplementary question was asked.

11.7 Question from Councillor David Edgar:

According to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 63% of the 200 million tonnes of waste generated in Britain annually is construction debris. The construction industry contributes around 40% of the country's total emissions. The London Plan 2021 Policy SI 7 sets a target for the London Mayor, waste planning authorities and industry of at least 95% of waste from construction and demolition to be reused, recycled or recovered. What steps has the council already taken or is planning to take through its planning framework, regeneration and other policies, and work with partners such as housing associations to minimise the waste and CO2 emissions from construction work and reuse rather than demolish buildings?

Response of Councillor Asma Islam, Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning:

The Tower Hamlets Reuse, Recycling and Waste Supplementary Planning Document SPD has recently been published. Our SPD (which can be found in the Council's Local Plan), sets out our expectations and requirements for managing waste and for securing the aim of increasing recycling rates, through specific policies.

Developers and contractors are legally bound by this plan through the planning application process. The Council may take enforcement action in relation to any breaches.

Supplementary question from Councillor David Edgar:

Can you confirm your plans to promote the SPD and ensure that Members are aware of developments as they take place?

Councillor Asma Islam's response to supplementary question:

The Council works with partners as part of a partnership summit, who were committed to reducing waste and encourage recycling during construction work.

We have also developed an action plan which is due to be published at the end of November, and in this we have included actions to address these specific issues.

11.8 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood:

Can the Mayor provide an update on the discussions with the London Fire Brigade as to the use of Community Infrastructure Levy monies to fund additional fire safety equipment?

Response of Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Housing:

The London Fire Brigade (LFB) have informed us that they have a strategic approach to the provision of fire safety equipment. Any additional equipment needs to be considered in that context. They have also advised us of the limitations on the provision of aerial appliances and where they can be situated, based on their facilities. They have advised us of the following:

- That 64m aerial appliances could not be accommodated in any of the stations in Tower Hamlets due to their size and weight.
- The additional costs associated with servicing, and training staffing to operate specialist appliances. This would create a substantial burden across the lifetime of the vehicle. This was in addition to the upfront costs, (which could be provided through capital funding).
- Due to the procurement timetable, it would take a number of years before they could be built and put into operation.
- That the LFB had bought three such appliances for stations in London and the first one is due to come in operation at the end of the year

We will continue to work with the GLA and LFB on the issue of fire safety equipment and how we can address the challenges of fire safety.

Supplementary question from Councillor Andrew Wood:

Can the Lead Member also provide an update on the discussions about the provision of other fire safety equipment not only ladders?

Councillor Danny Hassell's response to supplementary question:

Our conversations with LFB are ongoing and we will continue to provide updates.

11.9 Question from Councillor Amina Ali:

Can the Mayor provide an update on the Council's Building Safety Pledge and how it is supporting residents in Tower Hamlets?

Response of Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Housing:

Building safety is a key priority for the Council given that the Borough has the highest number of tower blocks in the country. This has been brought home by the events in the last couple of days. The Building Safety Pledge was launched in July. It was released to highlight the situation, as well as the resulting financial responsibilities and pressures this places on the Council.

We have embarked on a number of initiatives to raise awareness of the draft pledge and fire safety issues, including:

- Raising awareness of the pledge through media campaigns including the website, resident magazines, e – newsletters and social media.

- Holding an 'Ask the Mayor Event' with key partners, including the LFB and Tower Hamlets Homes to provide an opportunity for residents to ask questions and receive information.
- Working with the LFB in relation to consultation and engagement exercises and the Housing Forum to provide education on behaviours that can contribute to increased risk.
- Lobbying Central government on fire safety issues

More information can be found on the Council's website which will be updated following a review of the Council's webpages.

No supplementary questions was asked.

11.10 Question from Councillor Shah Ameen:

Can the Mayor update members on the council's plans to mark the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence?

Response of Councillor Sabina Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Sports:

I am really pleased to say that the Arts, Parks and Events Team have been delivering a wide range of activities and events, both on line and in person to celebrate the anniversary of Bangladesh's independence. Some of these highlights have include:

- Launching the dedicated webpage Bangladesh@50 to celebrate the programme, and other events delivered by partners.
- The Tower Hamlets Bangladeshi Film Festival, which had just taken place at the Rich Mix and the Brady Arts Centre. Preparations were also underway to deliver a special season of Bangla dramas, called Freedom and Independence.
- Installation of new art work at the Whitechapel Idea Store.
- A new exhibition at the Idea Store about the history of the independence struggle and the contributions of Tower Hamlets residents and the language struggle in the East End.

The events were being advertises on line.

No supplementary question was asked.

11.12 Question from Councillor Marc Francis:

Will the Lead Member for Housing state how many applications from homeless households for a review of the suitability of the temporary accommodation they have been placed in by LBTH were received in 2020/21, and how many of those were dealt with within the 56day period stipulated in the Government's Homelessness Code of Guidance?

Response of Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Housing:

I can confirm that between January 2020 to March 2021, the Council completed 77 suitability reviews within the stipulated timescale. 74 were completed outside the timeframe.

Whilst we note this is guidance and that some issues will overrun (due to the circumstances), we are also mindful that we need to do more. In the period April to August 2021, we have seen an increase in the number of reviews requested. Despite this, we successfully managed to conduct a similar number of reviews by the timescale.

We have taken a number of steps to deal with reviews in a more timely way including the recruitment of an officer to assist with this work and to deal with the increased demand.

Supplementary question from Councillor Marc Francis:

Can the Lead Member provide assurances that the number of suitability reviews exceeding the deadline will be reduced, and also undertake to look at the Court judgements about the quality of the placements, where they have overturned a Council decision? This is to ensure we learn best practice.

Councillor Danny Hassell's response to supplementary question:

Yes, we want to look at the lessons learnt. I am happy to look at the court judgements and make sure that staff were better equipped to carry out reviews. It was hoped, with the recruitment of the additional officer, we will be able to complete the suitability reviews on time.

11.13 Question from Councillor Val Whitehead:

What assessment has been made of the impact in Tower Hamlets of the Government's plans to cut Universal Credit by £20 per week?

Response of Councillor Mufedah Bustin, Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion:

We were very disappointed to hear about this decision – especially given the gravity of the impact of the pandemic on low income families, which was still largely unknown.

However, I can assure you that anyone receiving a 100% discount in their Council Tax support will continue to do so. Those receiving less will be reassessed to take account of their needs. We were currently working on the overall impact of the changes to Universal Credit, the end of the furlough scheme, the energy price cap, the increase in food prices, and the changes to National Insurance. This is with a view to producing a report, using the income family tracker dash board. We should have more information on this in the coming weeks.

Nearly 6 in 10 families with children in Tower Hamlets receive Universal Credit, or Working Tax Credits. The loss of £1040 a year will lead to additional hardship for households. Not to the mention the large number of households with legacy benefits who did not receive the uplift in the first place.

No supplementary question was asked.

11.14 Question from Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE:

What does the Mayor plan to do with the Liveable Streets programme in Weavers ward especially after the many concerns raised by residents at the doorstep, email and on social media?

Response of Councillor Kahar Chowdhury, Cabinet Member for Highways and Public Realm:

The Council has taken the decision to pause the scheme to review the programme, and the feedback from local residents and stakeholders. Following this further period of engagement, we intent to prepare further recommendations and to consult on these.

Supplementary question from Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE:

Will you be holding a public meeting in the Weavers ward?

Councillor Kahar Chowdhury's response to supplementary question:

We are looking at various consultation methods through a broad range of mediums – this could include public meetings, also leaflets and speaking to residents and businesses to assess the impact. Particularly, those who have been affected locally, both positively and negatively. We are happy to attend public meetings to consult further.

11.15 Question from Councillor Victoria Obaze:

How many families have been rehoused as part of project 120 over the last 5 years?

Response of Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Housing:

Project 120 aims to address the specific needs of families with wheelchair users or other complex needs on the Council's housing waiting list. I am pleased to say that the project has been a big success and makes a huge difference to the lives of so many across the Borough. Over the last five years, the project has accommodated 179 households with those specific needs. Over half of those have been in the last two years.

Supplementary question from Councillor Victoria Obaze:

How many more people are on the Council's waiting list?

Councillor Danny Hassell response to supplementary question:

About 20,000 households are on our housing waiting list. If you wish, I can provide you with a breakdown of people with specific housing needs on the waiting list .

Questions 11.16- 11.19 were not put due to the absence of the questioner. Question 11.11 was not put due to the absence of the questioner. (Note the written responses are included in Appendix A to these minutes)

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor Amina Ali **moved** and Councillor Rachel Blake **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda

The motion was put the vote and was agreed

RESOLVED**This council notes:**

1. The Tesco supermarket chain has embarked on a process of converting a number of Tesco Metro stores to Tesco Express.
2. Tesco Express pricing excludes the supermarket price-match offers, increasing the pricing of regular shopping for residents.
3. Many loose items (such as fruit and vegetables) sold in Tesco Express are charged per item rather than by weight, increasing the cost of healthy, staple food items for residents.
4. That some residents have reported price increases of specific items up to 33 per cent higher than those items listed on the Tesco website and available within Tesco Extra stores.
5. In Tower Hamlets, 44 per cent of our older residents live in low-income households, the highest proportion in England and more than double the national average.
6. That Tower Hamlets has one of the highest levels of child poverty in the country, with, once housing costs are taken in to consideration, 56% of children living below the poverty line.
7. Since 2017, this administration has invested £6.6 million in a Tackling Poverty programme to support: residents moving onto Universal Credit; financial inclusion; grassroots community and voluntary sector programmes; and, several 'test and learn' initiatives
8. Tesco's group sales rose by 8.8% to £53.4bn during the 52 weeks to 27 February 2021, while its UK sales increased by 7%.
9. The Mayor, Lead Member, and councillors across London have written to the CEO of Tesco, Ken Murphy, asking he reverse the covert price increases caused by the store conversion.

This council believes:

10. It is families and residents living in poverty who have been disproportionately affected by these price increases as many simply do not have an option to travel further afield to access larger stores.
11. This position has become more common and acute during the pandemic, with residents restricted and discouraged from travel to protect public health.
12. At the same time, travel costs may now be prohibitively expensive for those who have been pushing into unemployment.
13. That many residents are feeling the triple whammy of the end of Universal Credit uplift, furlough scheme ending, and a looming increase in National Insurance contributions.
14. Supermarkets have performed relatively well during the pandemic, compared to other retail businesses who have struggled through enforced closures.

This council resolves:

1. To write to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee asking that they review the decision by Tesco to convert its Metro stores to Express, and the impact this has on residents.
2. To ask the boroughs MPs to raise this issue in the House of Commons, raising national awareness of Tesco's pricing strategy.
3. To campaign to secure decent affordable food locally.
4. To continue to invest in innovative anti-poverty programme

12.2 Motion regarding One Housing Group Takeover by Riverside Housing Association

Councillor Peter Golds **moved** and Councillor Andrew Wood **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda

Councillor Danny Hassell **moved** and Councillor Mufeedah Bustin **seconded** the following amendment to the motion as set out in the supplementary agenda:

Amendments underlined.

The Council notes that in July the troubled One Housing Group, which manages 17,312 homes announced that it was to be taken over by the Riverside Housing Association based in Liverpool which currently manages 58,671 homes.

The Council further notes that:

This followed the revelation that One Housing had recorded a loss of £25.5 million in the last financial year and that the Regulator of Social Housing has downgraded the status of One Housing, which is a serious reputational loss to One Housing as an organisation.

There is a significant impact on the finances of One Housing in relation to building and fire safety works.

At the time of the stock transfer the four estates of the Isle of Dogs; the Barkantine, Kingsbridge, St John's and Samuda, were all managed by Toynbee Island Homes. In 2007 Toynbee Island Homes merged with the Community Housing Association to form One Housing. One Housing also own other homes across the borough.

Based in Camden Town, One Housing has frequently appeared remote to residents of this borough. This remoteness caused irreparable damage to the reputation of One Housing when, despite repeated denials, it was revealed that the organisation was secretly planning to replace the 2,000 homes on the four estates of the Isle of Dogs with 8,000 new properties. This resulted in the Regulator of Social Housing reporting in 2013 that, "the board (of One Housing) needs to enhance its oversight and scrutiny of the group's activities to maintain compliance with regulatory requirements"

The Council further notes that:

The original announcement of the takeover of One Housing by Riverside was reported to Councillors and covered in a press release, ~~tenants were not notified by One Housing until later. Tenants of the four estates were initially notified by the proposer of this motion by way of leaflets delivered by volunteers to their addresses.~~

There appear to have been no other options explored apart from this takeover, by Riverside, an organisation which itself has faced criticism for "taking away tenant's voices."

Tower Hamlets tenants and leaseholders of One Housing have expressed concerns regarding:

- The lack of meaningful consultation
- Inability to produce impact data for lessees
- Poor estate management
- Misleading brochures and information, which lack information on exactly how services to residents can or will be improved as part of the merger.
- Failing to share financial data with residents.

Despite the failure of Project Stone, One Housing have continued to propose redevelopment of the Kingsbridge Estate and before the takeover became known terminated a resident led steering group, whilst continuing to promote a ballot on a proposed redevelopment.

Following a letter to the Chief Executive of the Regulator of Social Housing by the proposer of this motion, to delay the takeover and cancel the ballot on the Kingsbridge development, the regulator has responded to say:

"The matters you raise about One Housing Group have now been assessed by our Consumer Regulation Panel in accordance with our Serious Detriment procedures. The panel was unable to conclude whether there has been a breach of the Consumer Regulations standards which has or could lead to serious harm to tenants."

“As such, further consideration is required and your complaint has been passed to our Investigation & Enforcement team, who will be contacting One Housing Group for further information. Once our Investigation & Enforcement team has investigated your concerns, they will contact you again within a further 20 working days from the date of this email with a reply or revised deadline.”

During this period and despite increasing concerns, residents have received a brochure urging them to support the takeover with a promise of financial investment, after the takeover.

The Mayor, the Cabinet Member for Housing and local councillors have written to One Housing highlighting their concerns and those of residents.

This Council believes:

Residents should be applauded for their hard work over many years to scrutinise One Housing and to hold them to account for their performance as a landlord and the delivery of their services.

Residents deserve to have access to information which enables them to make an informed decision on any mergers.

Consultation on issues such as mergers should be comprehensive and seek to engage residents in many ways with a dialogue about the issues involved.

One Housing and Riverside have not clearly set out the improvements that will be delivered to residents from the proposed merger.

The Council therefore agrees:

To call on the Regulator of Social Housing to delay the takeover until they are satisfied that this takeover is in the best interest of tenants and residents.

To ask the government that for future such mergers that tenants and leaseholders are given real and meaningful choices ~~including a referendum vote. That residents be offered three options~~ The range of options could include:

- ~~1. The~~ A recommended merger partner, who then has an incentive to make commitments about their future performance in order to win the vote
- Joining another local housing association or local housing provider where one is willing to accept them (and for the government to make necessary funding available to enable this).
- Use of referendum ballots on the decision.

~~2. To join any Council run housing provider (if one exists) which for many estates may well be a choice to reverse the decision they made in the stock transfer process~~

~~3. To join a locally based housing association willing to take them~~

That if the government truly believe in consumer choice and giving homeowners and tenants greater involvement in the management of their

homes (as we see in the moves towards Commonhold) that logically this should apply to all residents of homes regardless of tenure.

To call on the Regulator and the Minister to ensure that in these discussions tenants and residents come first and are consulted properly and independently as to the future management of their homes.

Councillor Peter Golds indicated that he accepted the amendment

The motion as amended was **agreed**.

RESOLVED:

The Council notes that in July the troubled One Housing Group, which manages 17,312 homes announced that it was to be taken over by the Riverside Housing Association based in Liverpool which currently manages 58,671 homes.

The Council further notes that:

This followed the revelation that One Housing had recorded a loss of £25.5 million in the last financial year and that the Regulator of Social Housing has downgraded the status of One Housing, which is a serious reputational loss to One Housing as an organisation.

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- Inability to produce impact data for lessees
- Poor estate management
- Misleading brochures and information, which lack information on exactly how services to residents can or will be improved as part of the merger.
- Failing to share financial data with residents.

Despite the failure of Project Stone, One Housing have continued to propose redevelopment of the Kingsbridge Estate and before the takeover became known terminated a resident led steering group, whilst continuing to promote a ballot on a proposed redevelopment.

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The Mayor, the Cabinet Member for Housing and local councillors have written to One Housing highlighting their concerns and those of residents.

This Council believes:

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Residents deserve to have access to information which enables them to make an informed decision on any mergers.

Consultation on issues such as mergers should be comprehensive and seek to engage residents in many ways with a dialogue about the issues involved.

One Housing and Riverside have not clearly set out the improvements that will be delivered to residents from the proposed merger.

The Council therefore agrees:

To call on the Regulator of Social Housing to delay the takeover until they are satisfied that this takeover is in the best interest of tenants and residents.

To ask the government that for future such mergers that tenants and leaseholders are given real and meaningful choices. The range of options could include:

- A recommended merger partner, who then has an incentive to make commitments about their future performance in order to win the vote
- Joining another local housing association or local housing provider where one is willing to accept them (and for the government to make necessary funding available to enable this).
- Use of referendum ballots on the decision.

That if the government truly believe in consumer choice and giving homeowners and tenants greater involvement in the management of their homes (as we see in the moves towards Commonhold) that logically this should apply to all residents of homes regardless of tenure.

To call on the Regulator and the Minister to ensure that in these discussions tenants and residents come first and are consulted properly and independently as to the future management of their homes.

(Motions 12.3- 12.5 were not considered due to lack of time).

The meeting ended at 10.06 p.m.

Speaker of the Council

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Appendix A

Written Responses to Member Questions not put at the 29th September 2021 Council Meeting

11.1 Question from Councillor Kyrsten Perry

What support is the council offering to Afghan refugees?

Response from Mayor John Biggs

I am proud that Tower Hamlets has pledged to support to Afghan refugee families.

The council will initially offer support for up to 5 households under one of the governments resettlement schemes. This is a similar number to most other London Councils.

The Council has set up a working group involving the key services which will provide the resettlement support both from within the council and the voluntary sector.

There is a dedicated website on the council's website which sets out the ways which residents can support Afghan refugee families. While there is no immediate need for donations of clothing and other goods, there may later be the need for specific items, e.g. laptops.

Residents can donate money to the London Refugee Response set up with leadership from the Mayor of London, London Councils and charitable funders from across London to provide much needed support to new arrivals from Afghanistan. Residents can also sign up to the Volunteer Hub and volunteer their time with the Volunteer Centre in Tower Hamlets to help Afghan or other refugees and asylum seekers.

11.16 Question from Councillor Ayas Miah

Many eligible businesses applied for COVID restart grants but they have not received them despite meeting all eligibility criteria. Can the Cabinet Member for Resources clarify why they have not received it, and whether the council has figures on how much in total we have received from the government and how much we have paid out to businesses?

Response from Councillor Candida Ronald , Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector

All qualifying business have now been paid the Restart Grant. The total grant allocation from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy for Restart Grants was over £22m, which like most Council's, was an overestimation of the number of qualifying businesses. This was based on VOA property description data which was out of date and assumed all properties were occupied.

The total amount paid thus far is over £20m to almost 2,300 qualifying businesses. The pandemic has been a challenging time for many businesses in the borough and we will continue to offer support as they rebuild.

Restart Grants	Amount Paid	Number of accounts
Non-Essential Retail	£2,914,095.00	768
Hospitality, leisure, accommodation, gym & sports and personal care	£17,428,000.00	1,480
Total Paid	£20,342,095.00	2,248

11.17 Question from Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan

The LBTH domestic abuse policy has been removed from the intranet and I understand that it's not been available to staff for a number of months whilst it is being consulted on. Can the Mayor confirm when the policy will be made available and if, in the interim, the previous policy might be made available to staff?

Response from Councillor Sirajul Islam

There has been a continual presence and page with useful links dedicated to Violence against Women and Girls, developed and regularly updated by the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) team.

There is also a guidance document available on the Bridge (the Council's intranet) for use by our staff and this includes how to respond sensitively, practical measures and information about safety.

However it is unclear why the guidance was not appearing on the dedicated page – this was possibly due to system updates – but the matter has been rectified and it is available on the Bridge.

11.18 Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed

What work is the council doing to support young people into training or employment?

Response from Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Work, Economic Growth and Faith

Young people have been one of the groups hit hardest by the economic fallout of the pandemic and the council is committed to supporting this cohort with a range of programmes.

This support includes:

- The council offering a range of apprenticeship opportunities to young people.
- Our Young Workpath service working with young people who are NEET or at risk of NEET, conducting over 3000 interviews per year. The service has now started to offer face-to-face interviews with vulnerable young people again.
- Securing 550 Kickstart placements for young people across the borough, including 33 placements secured within council services.
- Expanding Careers Advice and re-establishing the Careers Lead Network, tasked with developing cross-borough standards, disseminating information on courses and summer schools, and offering sector-specific advice.

- Launching the ‘Bridging the Divide’ partnership between GED, THEP, universities and employers to improve career pathway resources and immersive engagement events for young people.
- Developing “Taster Sessions” for care leavers to spend a day shadowing various roles in the Division. This is great a way for some young people who are in care to observe a role to see if this might be something they would like to pursue as a future career/ training option.
- The Supporting Families Division (within Children and Culture) has recently identified the potential for three apprenticeship roles for some of our care-leavers within our Early Help Service. These are likely to be offered at apprenticeship level 2-3.

11.19 Question from Councillor Rabina Khan

There is a constant failure to collect refuse and recycling across the estates in Shadwell.

As a Councillor I am consistently raising members enquiries in an effort to help residents, communities and businesses with problems relating to this problem. Shadwell is a small ward that should not require much effort to keep clean. Will the Mayor ensure refuse and recycling failures do not happen in the future and that every effort is made by the Director responsible for Environment to keep our streets, roads, and estates clean and tidy?

This is a very basic council function.

Response from Councillor Asma Islam, Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

The cleanliness of our streets and greenspaces is of the highest importance to the Council and one we take very seriously.

In Shadwell, waste collection services are performing above set standards and the teams are regularly monitoring media channels to respond to, and deal with, any reported issues. We are grateful for Councillor Khan’s 7 enquires over six months (3 cleansing, 1 recycling, 1 bio-diversity and 2 refuse) and have been pleased to respond to all of them.

Regarding Estates, the Council is working with our housing partners to tackle behaviours which sometimes result in delayed collections. Our teams too often find that private vehicles are blocking entrances to estates preventing access and immediate collection. Waste Services are working with both Parking and our Communications department to tackle this issue. However, despite these challenges, our teams, who have worked diligently throughout the pandemic, continue to ensure collections are made.

Further to these challenges the Council is tackling the blight of fly-tipping in both Shadwell and across the borough. Nearly 200 fixed-penalty notices for fly-tipping have been issued since April. The fines were handed out to people and organisations caught illegally and irresponsibly dumping items including bags of rubbish, old furniture, and appliances.

Every month the council collects about 250 tonnes of fly-tipped waste. Last year, crews cleared almost 3,200 tonnes of fly-tipped waste off our streets, the equivalent of almost 258 London buses, costing hundreds of thousands of pounds to get rid of.

We're here to help people recycle and get rid of their waste but we have zero tolerance to those who see the streets of our borough as their dumping ground, and we will always take action.

We thank councillor Khan for her assistance with this matter and would encourage her and her residents to continue to support the Council by reporting issues where she sees them.