

## Mayor's Report to Council

19<sup>th</sup> January 2022

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

### Key Events/Announcements

Happy New Year to everyone in the borough, and we are looking forward to a brighter 2022. This will be a very busy year for the Council, and it has already been a very productive start to the year.

**Budget:** The Budget for the upcoming year was discussed at Cabinet yesterday evening and will be going to Full Council for debate in March.

I am proud of the work we have done on this Budget, with no new cuts to council services this year and that we are looking to freeze the council's portion of Council Tax this year, other than 1% for the Adult Social Care precept. However, despite the Government's increase in funding in the settlement for this year, our budget continues to remain challenging and we are struggling with the effects of over ten years of austerity and an unprecedented increase in demand for council services due to the current cost of living crisis and the devastating effects of the pandemic. It is also important to note that the Government has only given a one-year funding settlement and we await further details of what their 'Levelling Up' agenda will mean for councils like Tower Hamlets.

The budget proposals invest in a cleaner, safer and fairer borough and unlock opportunity for all. It protects council-funded Free School Meals so 19,000 children get a meal, which equates to an estimated saving of £450 per child for families who previously have paid. It invests in new council homes to move families off the housing waiting list and out of overcrowded or unsuitable homes into genuinely affordable high-quality housing. It also invests in a 'fire safety team' to address building safety issues across the borough.

Despite over a decade of austerity this Council has worked hard to keep services open, for example keeping all Idea Stores and libraries open when nationally over 800 libraries have closed since 2010.

The Budget proposals have been published and you can see them via the link below:

<https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=720&MId=12321&Ver=4>

**Vaccination Roll-Out:** The rapid rise of the Omicron variant once again caused uncertainty during our Covid-19 recovery, however recent reports show that this variant is mild compared to previous variants and the current restrictions may be loosened in the upcoming weeks. However, we must remain vigilant and the key advice from the experts is that being double vaccinated along with a booster is the best defence. We have been working tirelessly with the local NHS and our partners to ensure all residents in the borough are given access to the vaccine and booster jab.

More information can be found on the Council's website: Covid-19 vaccines (towerhamlets.gov.uk)

**Mayor's Covid-19 Recovery Fund:** We are also doing great work with our Covid-19 Recovery Fund to support the economic, health and social recovery here in Tower Hamlets. Hundreds of small businesses in Tower Hamlets are set to benefit from grants of up to £1,250, after three new schemes to support them out of the pandemic were launched in December.

Nearly half-a-million pounds has been set aside for the grants, which will be allocated to businesses through the Business Adaptation Grant, the Creative and Cultural Futures Project and the Pivot Project 2 scheme. The pandemic has caused many businesses to close, while others that stayed open are struggling, but in taking action and creating grant schemes like these we are helping to support our local businesses and help stimulate the local economy.

**Local Community Fund and Infrastructure and Capacity Building Achievements:** From October 2020 to September 2021, the Council made an investment of £2.93 million into the Local Community Fund and I am proud to say that 21,165 Tower Hamlets residents have benefited from the projects set up from this fund. 74% of these residents were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, which shows the fantastic work the Council is doing to help our diverse communities. Tower Hamlets is such a diverse borough, and our aim is to ensure that the Council unlocks opportunity for all.

**Waste and Recycling:** We have, like other local authorities, had challenges with waste and recycling collection due to sickness and isolation as a result of the pandemic. We have risen to the challenges that have been posed and I am pleased to say that this has reduced and we are clearing the backlog.

We also faced issues with Underground Refuse Systems. As a borough we have the largest number that use this system. At the start of the month, we only had one URS vehicle operating, with the other vehicle being fixed and due to return to service by the end of the second week of January. We have now also invested in a new URS vehicle which is being delivered shortly and this should resolve these challenges.

**Tower Hamlets Connects:** We recently introduced a new service for residents called Tower Hamlets Connects, which will help our residents get the right help at the right time through the right channel.

The service was co-produced with residents and community organisations, to ensure it meets the needs of our diverse communities. It will provide access to advice and support on a range of issues around health and social care, including housing, welfare and benefits and consumer issues.

The service will also be able to help residents with wider issues, such as anyone experiencing financial difficulty by putting people in touch with experienced advisors. It will also provide in-person support with options to book one-to-one appointments with advisors for advice and advocacy in the community.

This is a great new service to promote to residents in your wards – more information can be found here: [www.towerhamletsconnect.org](http://www.towerhamletsconnect.org)

**Tower Hamlets Schools:** Seven schools from Tower Hamlets were named in the nation's top 500 schools by Parent Power Schools Guide, published in The Sunday Times in December 2021.

Our schools are an engine of opportunity, giving children and young people some of the best education in the country. We have a fantastic family of schools in Tower Hamlets, and we work very hard together to ensure our children and young people receive the high-quality education they deserve.

I am grateful to our education staff, children, young people, families and the wider community and education partnership for their continuing and coordinated action aimed at improving lives locally.

## **Individual Mayoral Decisions taken since last meeting**

4 Jan 2022 - Governance of Tower Hamlets Homes Board

10 Dec 2021 - Household Support Grant

10 Dec 2021 - Direct Award to BB7 and WC Evans

## **Engagements and Meetings**

### **18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 – 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

#### **18 November 2021**

- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Capital Strategy Board
- Meeting of the Tower Hamlets Co-operative Commission
- Goodbye to City Hall Reception
- Adults, Health & Wellbeing - Mayor's Portfolio Meeting
- Queen's Award Event

#### **22 November 2021**

- Civil Contingencies & Emergency Planning Portfolio Meeting
- Opening Islamophobia Awareness Month
- Resident Meeting - Mansard roof extensions in the Medway and Bow Conservation areas
- Mayor's Surgery
- Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director Place
- Follow-up Spitalfields Referendum Discussion
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee

#### **23 November 2021**

- Clare House update
- ICS Leaders' Bi-monthly Meeting
- Meeting with One Housing
- Pre-Meet - Regeneration Portfolio Meeting
- Reclaiming Gosling Gardens Follow Up Meeting
- Off Site possibilities in LBTH
- Clare House TRA

## **24 November 2021**

- Clarion Catch Up
- Jobs and skills launch
- Communications Portfolio Meeting
- Cabinet pre meet/run through
- Social Inclusion Portfolio Meeting
- Mayors Advisory Board
- Cabinet

## **25 November 2021**

- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Meeting regarding the Chinese Embassy
- Regeneration Portfolio Meeting
- Introduction Meeting with Keith Stanger - Head of Service for Safer Neighbourhood Operations
- Capital Strategy update
- Liveable Streets Programme
- Covid Champions Event
- Resident Meeting Selby Estate

## **26 November 2021**

- Councillor Rachel Blake
- Island Medical Centre opening event

## **27 November 2021**

- Mobile phone shop opening event

## **28 November 2021**

- Freedom and Independence Festival (Season of Bangla Drama)

## **29 November 2021**

- Corporate Induction
- Tower Hamlets Community Housing Meeting
- Mayors Surgery
- Communications activity – HIV testing
- Executive Committee

## **30 November 2021**

- John Scurr - November School Streets
- Photo Opp - Crisp Street Market
- New Covid strain meeting
- Open new artwork created by SPLASH as part of "Adopt a Station" project
- Strategic Forward Planning Meeting
- Violent Crime Task Force - ride along

### **1 December 2021**

- Clarion Catch Up
- MOPAC Consultation on Policing and Crime Plan 2021-2025 and VAWG Strategy
- St Mungos
- Meeting with Catherine McGuinness, Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee, City of London Corporation
- LSE Cities event
- Mayors Advisory Board
- Mayor's Political Cabinet
- Audit Committee

### **2 December 2021**

- Phone call - Mayor and Sir George Iacobescu
- School Street event
- Visit to Canary Wharf College
- Bethnal Green Liveable Streets Review
- Menorah lighting event
- AEG Contract meeting
- Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman
- Reception at Sonargaon restaurant

### **3 December 2021**

- Councillor Val Whitehead and Councillor Asma Begum
- Launch of Brick Lane Food Festival

### **4 December 2021**

- Aberfeldy Christmas lights switch-on and new homes celebration

### **5 December 2021**

- Celebration of 50 years of Bangladesh & 37 years of Apasen

### **7 December 2021**

- James Thomas, Corporate Director Children & Culture
- London Councils Labour Group Pre-Meeting
- London Councils Leaders' Committee
- Violence Plan Meeting
- Children Education & Youth Services Portfolio Meeting
- Tower Hamlets CVS 2021 Annual General Meeting
- Mayor's Surgery
- Speaker's Charity Ball

### **8 December 2021**

- Poplar HARCA Quarterly Meeting
- Planning Meeting
- Environment & Public Realm Portfolio Meeting
- Mayor's Housing Meeting
- A recovery for all: Tackling poverty together in Tower Hamlets - stakeholder meeting

### **9 December 2021**

- Regeneration Board
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- ELBA Toy Appeal event
- Careers Fair
- One Housing Meeting
- Pre-meet - leisure public meeting
- Options for Leisure Services in Tower Hamlets - Public Consultation meeting

### **10 December 2021**

- Councillor Rachel Blake
- Neighbourhood Plan Referendum legal advice
- LGA meeting

### **11 December 2021**

- Roman Road Christmas tree decoration event

### **12 December 2021**

- Invitation to Art workshop for children

### **13 December 2021**

- Councillor Asma Begum
- New Town Hall Members Consultative Steering Group Meeting

- Introductory Meeting for Rt Hon Jacqui Smith, Chair Barts NHS Trust
- Mayors Surgery
- Resident meeting
- Youth Commissioning
- Meeting regarding Wapping Station Step Free access

#### **14 December 2021**

- HAP Houses Regeneration Scheme
- Councillor Sirajul Islam
- PEG Catch Up
- Adults, Health & Wellbeing - Mayor's Portfolio Meeting
- Maltins and Brewster - Urgent Technical Briefing
- Mayor's Portfolio Meeting (Culture, Arts & Sport)
- Rushanara Ali MP
- Tower Hamlets Homes Christmas Event
- COVID 19 Local Engagement Board

#### **15 December 2021**

- Work & Economic Growth - Mayor's Portfolio Meeting
- Councillor Mufeedah Bustin
- O & S Chair Councillor Mohammed Pappu
- Meeting regarding the Waste Service
- Cabinet pre meet
- Mayor's Political Cabinet
- Berner TMO
- Mayors Advisory Board
- Cabinet
- Labour Group

#### **16 December 2021**

- TH Partnership Executive Group
- New Town Hall Project Board
- Visit to Ocean Estate
- Victory Day and Channel S TV Anniversary

#### **17 December 2021**

- Mayoral photo Victory Day

#### **20 December 2021**

- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Ann Sutcliffe Corporate Director

### **21 December 2021**

- Community Champions Webinar

### **22 December 2021**

- Meeting with StrengthsUnleashed
- Community meeting regarding St George's leisure centre
- Whitechapel Market discussion
- Will Tuckley Chief Executive
- MTFS update
- Meeting with Ensign

### **23 December 2021**

- Meeting with resident
- Budget discussion
- Meeting regarding Antill Road

### **5 January 2022**

- Mayor's Political Cabinet
- Mayors Advisory Board

### **6 January 2022**

- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Lichfield Road Follow Up Conversation

### **10 January 2022**

- Mayors Surgery
- New Town Hall Update
- UNISON London Region meeting
- O & S Chair Councillor Mohammed Pappu
- Chinese Embassy Project Meeting
- Isle of Dogs & South Poplar Area Board

### **11 January 2022**

- London First Borough Leader event with Mayor of Tower Hamlets
- Visit to Blackwall Depot



- Walkabout - Mile End Bengali Community Association, Eastend Homes,
- Rushanara Ali MP
- Policy development meetings

### **12 January 2022**

- Resources & Voluntary Sector Portfolio Meeting
- Croydon Staff Webinar re: Mayoral System
- One Housing - Merger Proposals
- Meeting about Wapping Station
- Children Education & Youth Services Portfolio Meeting
- Mayors Advisory Board
- Grants Determination Sub - Committee Meeting

### **13 January 2022**

- Local Authority NEL ICS Meeting
- Meeting regarding waste service
- Capital Strategy Board
- Civic Awards Panel Meeting

### **14 January 2022**

- ICS Leaders' bi-monthly meeting

### **17 January 2022**

- Corporate Induction
- Meeting with Young News
- Ann Sutcliffe Corporate Director
- Reopening of Tiller St. Leisure Centre - Ribbon Cutting event
- Executive Committee
- Labour Group

### **18 January 2022**

- John Connolly meeting with Mayor John Biggs to Planning Catch Up
- Lichfield Road Follow Up
- Introduction Meeting Chief Executive Tower Hamlets Community Housing
- Councillor Sirajul Islam
- Cabinet pre meet
- London Enterprise Academy Meeting
- Communications Portfolio Meeting

- Councillor Asma Begum
- Policy development meeting with Councillor Rachel Blake
- Policy development meeting with Councillor Asma Islam
- Cabinet

## **19 January 2022**

- Mayor's Housing Portfolio Meeting
- Mayor's Assets/Property Portfolio Meeting
- Regeneration Portfolio Meeting
- Mayor's Community Safety Portfolio Meeting
- Mayor's Political Cabinet
- Chief Executive Will Tuckley
- Pre-Council Labour Group
- Council