

## **Questions from 27<sup>th</sup> July Council requiring a written answer**

**11.5 Question from Councillor Abdul Malik Mr Mayor, as poverty has increased, so too has crime and desperation. Many of our Borough's residents do not feel safe on their own streets. What strategy will his Council be adopting to ensure that our residents feel protected and secure?**

Cllr Ohid Ahmed

Prevention is better than cure – we know crime and drugs are linked to poverty and inequality. The Aspire Administration has already implemented a package of measures to address the cost-of-living crisis. The safety of our residents' is very important to us. This Administration is determined that under Aspire, Tower Hamlets will be a safe place to live. Hand in hand with addressing poverty and the cost of living crisis, we will invest in deterrence and crime prevention.

To ensure tough consequences and deterrence, the Aspire Administration will:

- work with the Police to tackle drug-related crime and take drug dealers off the streets.
- help the Metropolitan Police to put more uniformed police officers on the streets and boost local police numbers
- improve the current Community Safety Service. These Police Officers will be supported by enhanced Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers to provide improved deterrence.
- Support an ambitious local recruitment campaign to make sure the Police Service is able to recruit local people and ensure policing is reflective of the diversity of our borough.

**11.6 Question from Councillor Abdal Ullah The Wapping bus gate has made a significant positive impact on Wapping, reducing noise, anti-social behaviour and long tailbacks of traffic through Wapping up to The Highway. With residents being given an exemption, the scheme has been a success. Can the Mayor outline his specific concerns regarding the Wapping bus gate that have sparked this recent consultation?**

Cllr Kabir Hussain

It is interesting that you should ask this question. It is on record that you closed Oldford Road and opened it without consultation. The Wapping Liveable Streets consultation closes at 11.59pm this evening (Wednesday 27th July 2022).

Aspire is committed to listening to residents. I will not prejudge the Consultation but we need to govern for the whole Community.

Since the implementation of the Liveable Streets programme, a significant number of objections and concerns have been raised by residents and businesses.

There have also been concerns raised about the impact of the closures on the 1600 taxi-card users who live in Tower Hamlets and rely on travel in licensed taxis and private hire vehicles. Due to severe mobility or sight impairment, taxi card users have difficulty in using buses, trains and the tube to travel.

We are currently consulting on plans to remove the Wapping bus gate and associated closure on Knighten Street, and a decision will be taken based on consultation feedback and an assessment of the relevant evidence.

**11.7 Question from Councillor Ahmodur Rahman Khan Mr Mayor, as I know you are aware, the D3 and D7 bus routes provide a lifeline to many of the poorest residents of our communities. They use these routes to get to work, to get their children to school and to move about the heart of our Borough. What is your administration doing to prevent the devastating impact that the closure of these routes would have on these residents?**

Cllr Kabir Hussain

Aspire Councillors organised a petition under the leadership of Deputy Mayor Maium Talukdar in order to amplify residents' voices in the TfL Consultation. The Deputy Mayor also wrote to Mayor Sadiq Khan highlighting the concerns of Tower Hamlets' residents. TfL are currently consulting on changes to the bus network. Whilst some changes which improve connectivity are welcomed, a number of changes will have substantial negative impacts on the bus network, increasing journey times and particularly affecting those with mobility impairments. Officers have reviewed the proposals made by TfL to change bus routes in the borough and have the following recommendations to be incorporated into the Council's response to the consultation:

- 1) Retain provision of an additional bus route serving Burdett Road corridor between Poplar/Limehouse and Mile End in addition to the 277.
- 2) Provide a more direct link to Crossharbour Asda and serving the Wood Wharf development on the D3 route by running down Preston's Road.
- 3) Retain link eastwards along D3 from Canary Wharf to Limehouse and Wapping to ensure the eastern part of Wapping continues to be served by the bus network.
- 4) Retain Bow Church/Bromley High Street link along D8 route.

A complete package of mitigation measures to improve interchange and waiting facilities to minimise inconvenience to passengers, prioritising according to:

- i) baseline flow of passengers who currently use the direct route and will be required to interchange;
- ii) key destinations served (e.g. transport hubs, hospitals, health centres, education and employment centres);
- iii) level of service frequency on interchange routes;
- iv) proportion of residents within demographic groups most affected, as highlighted in the Equality Impact Assessment.

As a Council, we know cutting the bus service will damage the Environment. What TfL is doing is not sustainable. It will cause more traffic and more pollution. Through the proposed cuts, TfL is inviting people to use cars rather than public transport. It will affect Disabled People and people with underlying health conditions. We need to remember Ella, the 9 year old who died prematurely. The Coroner found that air pollution was a contributory factor. This Administration wants to avoid pushing air pollution to poorer areas but instead have measures which reduce air pollution for everybody, not just a few.

**11.8 Question from Councillor Rebeka Sultana I have been approached by residents in my ward to express their concerns about crime rates in the borough. The previous Labour administration provided funding to deliver a £3.1 million CCTV transformation programme, along with other initiatives to tackle crime in Tower Hamlets. Can the**

**Cabinet Member please give us an update on what the Council plans to do to build on this work to reduce crime in the borough?**

Cllr Ohid Ahmed

This Administration will:

- work with all our community safety partners to tackle the big concerns for our residents, deliver our manifesto and the 4 priorities of the Community Safety Partnership. Prevention is better than cure – we know crime and drugs are linked to poverty and inequality. We have already implemented a package of measures to address the cost-of-living crisis.
- invest in drug treatment, rehabilitation and recovery programmes, including culturally sensitive projects targeting hard-to-reach addicts. The Aspire Administration will invest in youth services to help young people spend their time constructively and avoid ASB and crime.
- enhance initiatives to end domestic violence and make our streets safer for all women.

This Administration will invest in and build our resilience to crime through CCTV and design out crime initiatives.

To ensure tough consequences and deterrence, the Aspire Administration will:

- work with the Police to tackle drug-related crime and take drug dealers off the streets.
- help the Metropolitan Police to put more uniformed police officers on the streets and boost local police numbers
- improve the current Community Safety Service. These Police Officers will be supported by enhanced Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers to provide improved deterrence.
- Support an ambitious local recruitment campaign to make sure the Police Service is able to recruit local people and ensure policing is reflective of the diversity of our borough.

This Administration is concerned that Tower Hamlets features as one of the highest in London and in the top volume for crime rates. We need new solutions – preventative approaches as well as deterrence and tough consequences. CCTV is a useful tool to bring offenders to justice. Work on implementation of the upgrade to the brand new digital cameras is ongoing. This Administration is committed to maintaining an award-winning CCTV service and investment. In July 2022, the council launched mobile CCTV in the borough to improve our fast time response to ASB and coverage in all key areas across the borough. In addition, six new state of the art mobile cameras purchased are already deployed in our high crime & ASB hotspots.

**11.9 Question from Councillor Amin Rahman A huge proportion of our borough rely on the ability to move around it quickly and unrestricted, be they delivery drivers or cabbies. Yet the Liveable streets programme has not only failed them economically – it is failing all our residents in terms of emissions, pollution and the subsequent health risks that follow. How will the Mayor combat this failed scheme, and what is his plan to make Tower Hamlets greener and cleaner while keeping our Borough moving?**

Cllr Kabir Hussain

The Aspire Administration is consulting residents about traffic restrictions. As a listening Council we will take the views of residents seriously. The LTN has been a mixed experience. Emergency vehicles cannot get through. It is not sustainable. Working people travel through the pollution and gated communities have no one at home. As I said to the Antill

Road Petitioners, the road filter is not sustainable. We will bring change which improves the quality of life of many in the Community and not just a few

The Council is currently consulting on proposals to remove motor traffic restrictions installed under the Liveable Streets programme in Weavers, Old Bethnal Green Road and Brick Lane. There is also consultation on a proposal to remove the existing 'bus gate' in Wapping.

Following the conclusion of the consultations, a decision will be taken based on consultation feedback and an assessment of the relevant evidence.

The motor traffic restriction in Antill Road was, on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> July, removed under a new Experimental Traffic Order. The public are entitled to submit their views on the impact of this change for a period of six months.

The Council will continue to encourage residents to increase use of sustainable transport and switch to cleaner vehicles.

**11.10 Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin: The Audit Committee provides oversight and challenge to the Finance, Internal Audit and Risk Management areas of the council and is a key governance aspect of the council's structure. Why has the Mayor and the Aspire Party voted to appoint the Lead Member for Resources as a voting member on the Audit Committee?**

Reply by Cllr Saied Ahmed

- In the Council's Constitution, the Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee state that the Audit Committee should not be chaired by a Member of the Executive. By placing this restriction on the Chair of the Committee it ensures compliance with the guidance and ensures a level of objectivity. This has been confirmed by the Interim Head of Audit. Given your track record of 6 years unsigned accounts, it is helpful for the Executive to have competent people on the Audit Committee.

**11.11 Question from Councillor Musthak Ahmed Truman Brewery: Could the Mayor and cabinet members please provide an update on the legal challenge to the plan to build a shopping mall on the site of the historic Truman Brewery in Brick Lane?**

Cllr Kabir Ahmed

The judicial review legal challenge lodged by Spitalfields Historic Building Trust to the planning consent granted for the redevelopment of a section of the Truman Brewery estate site (located on the corner of Woodseer Street and Brick Lane) was heard at the Royal Courts of Justice on 29th and 30th June.

The Judge Mr Justice Morris listened to all the evidence over the course of the two-day hearing and the Council now awaits his decision. The Judge provided no timeframe to the Court or to any of the individual parties as to when he would issue his decision.

**11.12 Question from Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury Residents have raised concerns with me about the Council's move from paper parking permits and visitors' scratch cards to an online form. As I am sure you will agree, there are a number of residents – especially those who are elderly and vulnerable – who do not have access to the internet and are therefore now unable apply for their parking permits. Can the Cabinet Member describe what actions the Council will be taking to make parking in the borough accessible to all?**

Cllr Suluk Ahmed

Using online forms rather than paper versions saves the council time and money, but we recognise that some residents do require paper versions. Parking Services have an assisted channel in place whereby customers who have limited ability or no access to online services can call the customer contact centre and request visitor scratch cards over the phone on 020 7364 5003.

For those residents who require a parking permit and have difficulty in obtaining a permit online, they can visit the idea stores whereby a customer advisor will assist and guide residents with their online application and they can also call the customer contact centre for assistance. If further assistance is required the call will be passed on to specialists in the parking permits team.

**11.13 Question from Councillor Abdul Mannan Mr Mayor, for too long residents in our borough have been squeezed out of their homes by avaricious landlords, rising rent prices and a dearth of council and affordable housing. How are you ensuring that Tower Hamlets remains a Borough that values its proud history of welcoming all who enter it, and helping them to stay in decent, affordable housing?**

Cllr Kabir Ahmed

The Aspire Administration has a Manifesto commitment of building 1000 Council Houses a year. Previously, we delivered 8590 Council Homes. Tower Hamlets has a proud history of being a welcoming place, and the Council works strategically with housing developers and housing associations to secure decent affordable homes for local people.

This is done through the planning process and the borough consistently delivers one of the highest numbers of new affordable homes per year in the country.

The council also has its own house building programme and is set to deliver a significant number of new affordable homes over the next 4 years. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to build more affordable homes.

We also work hard to improve standards for those living in private rented accommodation and to challenge rogue landlords.

**11.14 Question from Councillor Kamrul Hussain Mr Speaker, the heritage of our borough is one of the richest and most diverse, not only in London, but in the whole of the UK. From Cable Street to Brick Lane, Stepney to the Isle of Dogs, we boast some of the most iconic landmarks in the country. I ask the Mayor, how will his administration continue the conservation of these sites, while championing and rejuvenating older equivalents?**

Cllr Kabir Ahmed

The rich and diverse culture and heritage of Tower Hamlets is one of its greatest strengths. It is important that we recognise this and ensure that we celebrate the culture of our diverse communities while also growing and developing.

The planning system plays a key role in striking this balance. The current Local Plan, alongside the London Plan, includes a number of policies that seek to ensure that Tower Hamlets' cultural heritage is protected and enhanced ensuring a sensitive balance between, and integration of, old and new. I will be reviewing the Local Plan to ensure we have that balance right.

The New Town Hall is an excellent example of how this can be done successfully, revitalising a listed building that has a place in many of our hearts and ensuring it plays a new and important role in improving the lives of the residents of Tower Hamlets.



**11.15 Question from Councillor Abdul Wahid Mr Mayor, football plays a huge role in our Borough's daily life, with huge support for several London clubs and an excellent and healthy local sporting tradition. How will you use your time in office to harness this passion and provide our communities with a competitive yet unifying experience to express their love for the beautiful game?**

Cllr Iqbal Hossain

The Council's Sport & Physical Activity Service previously organised the Mayor's Cup in partnership with local football providers since its inception in 2011.

Officers are currently reviewing options for delivery of the Mayor's Cup in partnership with local football providers, and will be reporting on the options to the Mayor and Lead Member shortly. The timing will need to take into account football club commitments to their league and cup matches.

**11.16 Question from Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled Mr Mayor, what will your administration be doing to bring our Borough's women closer to the heart of social, cultural and economic power during your first term?**

Cllr Suluk Ahmed

We have pledged to empower women and develop dedicated programmes and spaces for women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The council has commissioned a 'Dare to Lead' programme which offers women the opportunity to engage in a 12-week accredited women's leadership programme and empowers them with the skills and confidence to become community leaders and progress in their careers. We have also established the Women's Community Network which enables women to shape service provision, policy and decisions by giving them a greater voice. The Network aims to reduce inequalities faced by women by engaging with women's groups, improving participation in civic life and tackling key issues, and running 'awareness' and celebratory events. We will scope opportunities for further programmes to support women, particularly Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women. We will ensure they are engaged as we develop and deliver a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leadership programme for local residents which will consist of training, mentoring and shadowing and provide them with the support to assume community leadership roles and enhance their influence over decision making.

We will support a dedicated resource centre for the women of Bangladeshi community and will identify where further dedicated community facilities would be appropriate to help increase the capacity of women in the borough.

We will aim to provide more opportunities for women and girls to access sports provision and this will be a key focus in our recommissioning of the leisure contract. We will promote women's sports and increase availability of women's gym and swimming sessions, ensuring our facilities and our partners facilities are women friendly.

We will support our women to access and thrive in employment. We have a flexible support fund which we can spend on childcare to support starts into work and we're working with our Children's Centres to better market childcare support, sign-post and facilitate access to funds and providers. Our Supported Employment Team is also working with care providers across the borough to support them with their recruitment needs and, whilst not exclusively for women, this is a sector to which far more women are attracted. We will also promote the construction sector to women, and our new Careers & Social Mobility team will be working to

promote a wide range of sectors to our young people with a conscious effort to make career aspiration a gender neutral thing

### **Women's Safety**

I have pledged to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG), and we will support initiatives to end domestic violence and make our streets safer for all women. The council's VAWG strategy sets out our priorities - supporting victims, holding perpetrators to account, and engaging the community and challenging misogyny.

We have a dedicated VAWG Team within the Council delivering a programme of work and outreach including our VAWG Champions scheme, outreach to residents (including our work with the East London Mosque during the 16 days of action against Gender Based Violence) and our whole-school approach to tackling VAWG. We commission refuges for victims of domestic abuse including dedicated provision for South Asian women and children. We commission Independent Domestic Violence Advocates including dedicated Sylheti speaking provision and also provide support into dedicated Domestic Violence courts to support victims.

A series of women's safety walks over the next 12 months will be co-led by different women's organisations and will focus on locations that are known to be unsafe for women, either through intelligence or from women themselves. Within the Council we have two Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers dedicated to focus on women's safety and we will work with the Women's Forum to organise a public event each year to highlight the importance of women's safety.

**11.17 Question from Councillor Harun Miah Mr Speaker, in 2018, 137 languages were spoken in our Borough's schools. That is something that we as a local authority should be immensely proud of and is a statistic that should be celebrated and championed, not shied away from. What will your Council be doing to encourage those children from multilingual homes to develop their mother tongues and further enrich the already deep cultural and linguistic diversity present in our Borough?**

Cllr Maium Talukdar

Tower Hamlets is very proud to be one of the most diverse boroughs in the country, and we celebrate that diversity in many ways. Our schools, school library service and Global Learning London consistently do great work to ensure that children are encouraged both to learn about and celebrate their own heritage, as well as learning about others. Each year we support events that bring people together to celebrate their culture and heritage, such as the 50th Anniversary of Bangladeshi Independence last year. And officers are now scoping options for reviving a Community Language service that will give children the opportunity to learn the language of their family heritage. This includes working with community based organisations who have experience of delivering community language classes

**11.18 Question from Councillor Ahmodul Kabir Council Tax Relief: Mr Mayor, Council Tax Relief is by definition help for those whose income is beneath a certain threshold. How will you rectify the unfair way in which self-employed residents have been denied relief by the previous Administration?**

Cllr Saied Ahmed

- It is definitely not fair that the self-employed on low income do not benefit in the same way as the employed. As I said to Cllr Jahed Choudhury earlier, we will explore how we can support low paid workers. The self-employed deserve to benefit from the same measures open to those receiving wages.



- We will need to consult in order to bring much needed change. Rest assured we will act in the best interests of residents. Tower Hamlets changed its scheme in 2017 and ensured that residents on low income retained 100% of their Council Tax Rebate. Tower Hamlets remains one of only a handful of London Councils who have retained these provisions. We need to ensure that the self-employed are treated fairly and that the generous scheme operated by Tower Hamlets extends to them

**11.19 Question from Councillor Bellal Uddin Mr Mayor, in rebuilding Tower hamlets and rebuilding our future, our Manifesto pledges to run a Council which listens to residents. Could you tell us which consultations are open or planned so we can encourage residents to give us their views?**

Cllr Kabir Ahmed

Our new strategic plan underlines our commitment to listen to residents from across all our communities and take their views into account when making decisions.

When engaging with the community the council uses its Consultation and Engagement Handbook which was developed in partnership with the Consultation Institute in 2019. The Handbook incorporates engagement and consultation best practice and legal principles so that we can get the most out of conversations with our diverse community, ensure that our consultations are meaningful and comply with relevant law.

We also have an online consultation hub; Let's Talk Tower Hamlets where all our current and recent consultations are published. There are 18 current consultations listed on the site. These range from locality specific proposals for regeneration, development or improvements to borough-wide consultations on national issues including equalities issues and climate change. Consultations that are active now include a 'Call for Sites' which invites suggestions from individuals and organisations about potential sites for (re)development, this information will be used to inform the refreshed Local Plan.

There are several consultations relating to the manifesto pledge to reverse Liveable Streets closures, a reminder that the deadlines for these consultations are approaching so people in areas affected should respond as soon as possible.

We also have 6 upcoming consultations on the expansion of St Saviour's Primary School, the future of council housing management functions, our Budget allocation, and the spending of our Local Infrastructure Fund.

We are in the process of setting up an online resident panel using the Let's Talk Tower Hamlets site. We promoted recruitment in the spring and have already had interest from over 400 residents across the borough. We are currently testing the approach with a sub panel looking at communications messaging and plan to start a broader recruitment drive for membership of the panel later this year with the objective of getting up to 2,000 members.

**11.20 Question from Councillor Ana Miah Mr Mayor, Fairness and Equity is at the heart of our Manifesto, how will you ensure that our diverse communities are represented at all levels of the Council and not just in the lower ranks?**

We had a workforce to reflect the community strategy, which actively promoted the inclusion of women and minorities in higher level roles within the Council. The Mayor is committed to this policy to ensure that these groups are represented at all levels of the Council. The Mayor has a female Chief of Staff and several BME members of staff in his team. The

Council also has two BME Directors, both of whom are women, and another female director at senior level. However, this does not mean that the number of employees from diverse background at the top of the organisation cannot and should not be increased, and the Mayor and his administration will work hard to ensure this increase happens.

**11.21 Question from Councillor Nathalie Bienfait I'd like to bring to the attention of the Mayor serious safety concerns around traffic on Tredegar Road, Bow as well as the so-called Skew Bridge. The safety and health of residents living around these two locations are at daily risk because of a lack of pedestrian security features, narrow roadways causing dangerous driving and speeding and blind corners. Residents' property has been repeatedly damaged by speeding vehicles around Skew Bridge; residents have to put up with daily arguments around the Tredegar/Coborn Roads junction due to the road not being wide enough to allow two vehicles to pass each other; pedestrians and cyclists using both areas are constantly at risk of serious injury. What is the Mayor currently doing to improve safety at these two locations?**

Cllr Kabir Hussain

The safety of our residents' is very important to us. As the Lead Member for the Environment and Climate Emergency, I will be asking Officers for a briefing so the Council Can come up with solutions for these issues and residents' concerns. This Administration is determined that under Aspire, Tower Hamlets will be a safe place to live.

**11.22 Question from Councillor Peter Golds The recently published 2021 census showed Tower Hamlets to be the fastest growing local authority in the country, with a population of 310,300. This is, however, lower than had been forecast or expected. This reduction of the estimated population will have an appreciable affect with regard to government grant aid which is based on population statistics. There is evidence that during the enumeration period many residents of Tower Hamlets, including students and young people, had gone elsewhere due to lockdown but have now returned. Will the Mayor outline what discussions have been initiated on this subject between the council, government and other London Councils?**

Cllr Saied Ahmed

- The first results from Census 2021 were published on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022 and confirmed what we already knew, that Tower Hamlets is the fastest growing and most densely populated borough in the country. This is important evidence for us to use when making the case for additional infrastructure funding. However, the increase in population size is not as great as had been anticipated through ONS's mid year estimates (MYEs) which are published annually between census years. This gap between population projections and census results has affected a number of inner London boroughs in a more extreme way than Tower Hamlets.
- Our population according to the Census is 7% below the figure from the last MYEs (332k).
- Three inner London boroughs; Westminster, Camden and Kensington & Chelsea have all seen a net reduction in population compared to 2011. In recent decades, London overall has experienced rapid population growth, this has decreased in the decade from 2011 to 2021 according to census 2021 results. Westminster and Camden have questioned the government's decision to run the census in March

2021 when the country was in lockdown as there were many extraordinary circumstances which may have impacted on population numbers.

- With other London boroughs, I attended a meeting with ONS on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> July to jointly request that ONS review the MYE forecasting model. We also took part in the Census Quality Assurance exercise in April 2022 and asked that the ONS pay particular attention to how the pandemic affected results. We know for example that many students were away from campus and many young Londoners were furloughed, lost their jobs or moved back home out of the capital temporarily.
- I will continue to lobby London Councils, the ONS and Government to ensure that Tower Hamlets does not lose out on the funding we require.