

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL**

**HELD AT 7.08 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL**

**Members Present:**

Mayor Lutfur Rahman (Member)	Councillor Iqbal Hossain (Member)
Councillor Faroque Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Kabir Hussain (Member)
Councillor Kabir Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Kamrul Hussain (Member)
Councillor Leelu Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Shahaveer Shubo Hussain (Member)
Councillor Musthak Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Asma Islam (Member)
Councillor Saied Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Sirajul Islam (Member)
Councillor Shafi Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Ahmodul Kabir (Member)
Councillor Suluk Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled (Member)
Councillor Ohid Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Ahmodur Khan (Member)
Councillor Sabina Akhtar (Member)	Councillor Sabina Khan (Member)
Councillor Amina Ali (Member)	Councillor James King (Member)
Councillor Asma Begum (Member)	Councillor Abdul Malik (Member)
Councillor Maisha Begum (Member)	Councillor Abdul Mannan (Member)
Councillor Nathalie Bienfait (Member)	Councillor Ana Miah (Member)
Councillor Rachel Blake (Member)	Councillor Ayas Miah (Member)
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin (Member)	Councillor Harun Miah (Member)
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury (Member)	Councillor Amin Rahman (Member)
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury (Member)	Councillor Rebaka Sultana (Member)
Councillor Jahed Choudhury (Member)	Councillor Maium Talukdar (Member)
Councillor Abu Chowdhury (Member)	Councillor Bellal Uddin (Member)
Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury (Member)	Councillor Abdal Ullah (Member)
Councillor Marc Francis (Member)	Councillor Abdul Wahid (Member)
Councillor Peter Golds (Member)	

**Agenda Order**

During the meeting, Members agreed to change the order of business. To aid clarity the minutes are presented in the order items appear on the Agenda. At the meeting Agenda Item 13 (Urgent Motion on Waste) was taken during Agenda Item 7 (Administration Motion for Debate).

**The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Jahed Choudhury in the Chair**

The Speaker of the Council provided an update on engagements he had undertaken since the last Council meeting in July 2023. He said he had attended events celebrating the academic and sporting achievements of various organisations including a community group which had won their cup for a third year in a row. Other highlights included:

- The awards the Council had won at the London in Bloom awards ceremony. The Speaker was particularly pleased with this owing to his interest in gardening. He said he was proud to see Tower Hamlets had won 4 categories and had achieved a gold award in many other categories. He congratulated everyone involved in this achievement.
- The Speaker had visited Billingsgate market with the Lord Mayor to collect the annual rent payment of one Salmon, which had been donated to the St Joseph's Hospice.
- He had attended the annual Merchant Navy Memorial Day at Trinity Square Gardens, as the first citizen of the borough.
- The Speaker expressed his condolences for the victims of the natural disasters in Libya and Morocco and said his thoughts and prayers were with those who had lost so much.
- The Speaker paid condolences and tribute to Mr Aslam Uddin who had died recently. He said Mr Aslam was a well-respected community activist and former co-ordinator of the Council of Mosques in Tower Hamlets. Councillor Maium Talukdar and Councillor Abdal Ullah also expressed their condolences and acknowledged Mr Uddin's achievements on behalf of their groups.

Finally, the Speaker wished Mr Ian Polston, member of the facilities management team the best for the future. Mr Polston was moving to a new role within the Council however had provided support to Town Hall and Council meetings over many years, ensuring they ran smoothly.

### **Procedural Motions**

Councillor Kabir Hussain moved Procedure Motion 12.1 (n) to suspend Procedure Rule 11.1 to allow for an Urgent Motion to be tabled on the Waste Strike. This was seconded by Councillor Maium Talukdar.

Councillor Saied Ahmed moved Procedure Rule 12.1 (g) to withdraw the Administration Motion for Debate on Management of Council Assets and Procedure Rule 12.1 (c) to change the Order of Business to consider the above Urgent Motion on the Waste Strike under Agenda Item 7 (Administration Motion for Debate) on the grounds of urgency due to the impact the strike was having on residents. These were seconded by Councillor Maium Talukdar.

Councillor Sabina Akhtar moved Procedure Rule 12.1 (g) to withdraw the Motion at Agenda Item 12.2 on Waste. This was seconded by Councillor Sirajul Islam.

The Speaker accepted the reasons for urgency in respect of accepting the Urgent Motion and changing the order of business. The above Procedural Motions were put to the vote and were **agreed**.

### 1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Amy Lee

### 2. **DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS**

Councillor Musthak Ahmed and Councillor Amin Rahman declared a non-pecuniary – other registerable interest in Agenda Item 8 (Opposition Motion for Debate) and declared they had been appointed Board Members of Tower Hamlets Community Housing by the Council.

The Speaker, Councillor Jahed Choudhury and Councillors Abdul Mannan, Ayas Miah, Bodrul Choudhury and Ohid Ahmed declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 8 (Opposition Motion for Debate), as either tenants and/or leaseholders of property owned by Tower Hamlets Community Housing or Poplar HARCA.

Councillor Maisha Begum declared an Other Non-Registerable Interest in that a family member were a tenant/leaseholder of Tower Hamlets Community Housing or Poplar HARCA.

The Monitoring Officer granted a dispensation, to the above-named members due to the impact on the political balance at the meeting, owing to the large number of declarations made.

Councillor Ohid Ahmed left the chamber and did not participate in the debate.

### 3. **MINUTES**

Council **RESOLVED** to:

1. Agreed that the minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary Council meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> July 2023 be approved as a correct record of the proceedings and the Speaker was authorised to sign them accordingly.

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

**Announcements from the Chief Executive**

- The Covid & Flu vaccine programme was launched nationally on the 11<sup>th</sup> September. Eligible groups can receive their vaccines from several GP surgeries and community pharmacies.
- The LGA Peer review took place week commencing 18<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> September. The review entails a process of observation and analysis, with 175 staff members from diverse services interviewed. The results are positive, with the Peer reviewers praising the direction of travel of the Council.
- The Council has won several awards such as the Government Property Award for 2023 for Project of the year, relating to the new Town Hall. The London in Bloom Awards ceremony, including Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park winning the Large Conservation, Large Cemetery/Cremation category and Victoria Park achieving Gold for Large Park/Heritage Park/Garden category.
- The Chief Executive Roadshows were currently taking place and have been well attended by staff who have put a range of questions and concerns to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive said this type of staff engagement was crucial during this time of improvement and transformation.

## 5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

Council **RESOLVED** to note:

The Petition relating to the Compulsory Purchase of the Westferry Printworks for a school, was withdrawn by the Petitioner prior to the start of the Council meeting.

## 6. MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Lutfur Rahman presented his report to the Council.

The Opposition Group Leader, Councillor Sirajul Islam then responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

Mayor Rahman provided concluding remarks.

## 7. ADMINISTRATION MOTION DEBATE

Council **RESOLVED** to note:

The Administration motion on the Management of Council Assets was withdrawn by consent of members, through a vote.

## 8. OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE

## TOWER HAMLETS COMMUNITY HOUSING

Council considered a motion as printed in the agenda relating to Tower Hamlets Community Housing, that had been moved by Councillor Marc Francis and seconded by Councillor Asma Islam.

Council also considered the amendment proposed by Councillor Kabir Ahmed and seconded by Councillor Abdul Mannan, as set out in the supplementary agenda.

### ADDITIONS - BOLD

### DELETIONS - ~~STRUCKTHROUGH~~

#### This Council notes:

- THCH was founded by stock transfers from LBTH and for many years delivered high-quality housing management as well as the regeneration of estates and community development;
- THCH was recently downgraded to a G3 and V3-rating by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) for both governance and financial viability;
- The RSH has encouraged THCH to be taken over by another housing association and THCH has subsequently begun a consultation on a merger with Poplar HARCA;
- The RSH has a very poor track record in enforcing mergers between housing associations in Tower Hamlets and doesn't proactively take any account of residents' views.
- **That the Mayor has twice met with THCH residents to hear and discuss their concerns, and has instructed Officers to monitor the merger and any adverse impacts on them.**
- **That the Mayor and Officers are reviewing RSL performance more broadly and are preparing a new policy on strengthening governance.**
- **That in October the Social Housing Ombudsman is coming to the Town Hall for an event to be chaired by the Mayor to address all RSL residents concerns.**

#### This Council believes:

- THCH tenants and leaseholders deserve a much better service than they have been getting from their landlord for several years;
- LBTH has an ongoing obligation to residents living on those estates transferred to ensure the promises made by are delivered consistently;
- Enforced mergers of local stock transfer housing associations have sometimes resulted in residents receiving an even worse service from the social landlord they join;

- The views of tenants and leaseholders in the future of their housing association should be paramount in any decision by the Board of THCH and the RSH.

**This Council resolves:**

- To call on the Mayor to make representations to the RSH calling for the views of residents of THCH to be fully taken into account prior to a decision on any merger;
- ~~To call on the Mayor to instruct council officers to urgently undertake a feasibility on the financial and practical implications of requesting a return of THCH stock to LBTH;~~
- ~~To call on the Mayor to arrange a public meeting with residents of THCH to hear to listen directly to their experience of its services and thoughts what should happen.~~
- **To continue supporting those residents affected by the merger and to ensure good channels of communication are maintained for those residents' concerns;**
- **To support the Social Housing Ombudsman event taking place in October and encourage concerned THCH residents to attend.**
- **To support the Mayor in his efforts to strengthen RSL governance and resident engagement, and ensure that the services they provide improve.**

Following debate, the amendment moved by Councillor Kabir Ahmed was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

The motion as amended by Councillor Kabir Ahmed was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

**RESOLVED**

**This Council notes:**

- THCH was founded by stock transfers from LBTH and for many years delivered high-quality housing management as well as the regeneration of estates and community development;
- THCH was recently downgraded to a G3 and V3-rating by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) for both governance and financial viability;
- The RSH has encouraged THCH to be taken over by another housing association and THCH has subsequently begun a consultation on a merger with Poplar HARCA;
- The RSH has a very poor track record in enforcing mergers between housing associations in Tower Hamlets and doesn't proactively take any account of residents' views.
- That the Mayor has twice met with THCH residents to hear and discuss their concerns, and has instructed Officers to monitor the merger and any adverse impacts on them.

- That the Mayor and Officers are reviewing RSL performance more broadly and are preparing a new policy on strengthening governance.
- That in October the Social Housing Ombudsman is coming to the Town Hall for an event to be chaired by the Mayor to address all RSL residents concerns.

**This Council believes:**

- THCH tenants and leaseholders deserve a much better service than they have been getting from their landlord for several years;
- LBTH has an ongoing obligation to residents living on those estates transferred to ensure the promises made by are delivered consistently;
- Enforced mergers of local stock transfer housing associations have sometimes resulted in residents receiving an even worse service from the social landlord they join;
- The views of tenants and leaseholders in the future of their housing association should be paramount in any decision by the Board of THCH and the RSH.

**This Council resolves:**

- To call on the Mayor to make representations to the RSH calling for the views of residents of THCH to be fully taken into account prior to a decision on any merger;
- To continue supporting those residents affected by the merger and to ensure good channels of communication are maintained for those residents' concerns;
- To support the Social Housing Ombudsman event taking place in October and encourage concerned THCH residents to attend.
- To support the Mayor in his efforts to strengthen RSL governance and resident engagement, and ensure that the services they provide improve.

**9. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES****9.1 Report of Cabinet: Statement of Licensing Policy 2023**

Councillor Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency presented the Statement of Licensing Policy 2023 report. He explained Council was required to approve the Licensing Policy, which had been to Cabinet and would take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023.

**RESOLVED**

Council **AGREED** to:

1. Adopt the Statement of Licensing Policy to take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023.

## **10. OTHER BUSINESS**

### **10.1 Annual Report of the Standards Advisory Committee**

Mr John Pulford, Independent Chair of the Standards Advisory Committee presented the annual report. He outlined the achievements of the Committee before members added their comments. In particular, Members of the Council thanked John Pulford and the Co-opted Members of the Committee for their hard work and support throughout the year.

#### **RESOLVED**

Council **AGREED** to:

1. Note the annual report of the Standards Advisory Committee for 2022-23.

### **10.2 Appointment of a Co-Opted Member to the Standards Advisory Committee**

Mr John Pulford, Independent Chair of the Standard Advisory Committee stated the Committee had run a recruitment exercise to fill a vacancy for a co-opted member on the Committee. He requested Council to approve the appointment of the co-optee selected.

#### **RESOLVED**

Council **AGREED** to:

1. The appointment of Faham Sinan-Katamba as a co-opted member of the Standards Advisory Committee for a four-year term, expiring 28<sup>th</sup> September 2027.

## **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 Amin Rahman.**



Could the lead member provide an update on the status of the council's outstanding accounts requiring sign off? These accounts were left unsigned for many years under the previous administration.

**Response from Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living.**

Thank you for your question. The accounts had been left unsigned for many years by the previous administration. However, I am pleased to report that 2016/17 and 2017/18 accounts had their certificates issued by KPMG in March 2023, so these years are now completed.

For 2018/19 and 2019/20 accounts, the audits are close to completion in terms of the number of significant issues being investigated, there being only one remaining. The Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer will be meeting with Deloitte within the coming week to establish a clear commitment and assurance regarding Deloitte ability to resource the process to achieve timelines required for November Audit Committee approval and to ensure a smooth handover to our newly appointed auditors Ernst &Young.

The historical low for our council has been rectified.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Amin Rahman.**

Can you provide update on whether the financial statements, for more current years will be affected due to the issues raised by the auditors in the past?

**Response of Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living.**

We now have a permanent Section 151 officer, which is good news for the Council. As each year's accounts move closer to finalisation, there is a great deal of learning that then needs to be applied to subsequent years. Officers are pro-actively applying these improvements, with the aim of them being reflected in future years' accounts at first publication. As a result, the 2021/22 and 2022/23 accounts have not been produced yet.

**11.2 Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin.**

When will the Mayor be in a position to communicate the outcome of his review of the council's asset portfolio? Many organisations are left in limbo, including those waiting 18 months for decisions on meanwhile use properties, and in my ward, lease renewals for the Mudchute and operators for Island Gardens café.

**Response from Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living.**

The review of transactions is an ongoing process, and transactions are progressing following completion of reviews. Some cases are more complex than others, and outcomes will be communicated once all the issues have been considered. The decisions on the two specific cases mentioned have been completed and the relevant organisations are being informed.

The Mayor has always supported those organisations in the third sector, unlike the previous administration who reduced recipients and reducing funding. Mayor will significantly increase the funding and double the number.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Mufedah Bustin.**

Looking at the Mayor's grants programme, the funding applied to advice services has been reduced. Most of the funding for grants has been taken from the neighbourhood CIL, from the Island and invested in other parts of the Borough. I want to know when will Mudchute and the operators of Island Gardens Café know about the offer made to them.

**Response from Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living.**

The process followed for review was officer led and has been reviewed by the Chief Executive. This has been agreed by Cabinet. The administration is making the right choices unlike the previous labour administration.

**11.3 Question from Councillor Musthak Ahmed.**

Can the lead member share the findings of the independent investigation into housing management following the complaint brought by 31 members of staff in the department?

**Response from Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding.**

I'd like to thank the booking team for the exceptional work they have done, to progress this matter. However, the matter has yet not been finalised but has been progressed following our internal procedures. At this stage it would not be appropriate to share any details on this matter given that it relates to confidential staffing matters. Once the matter has been concluded, and if there are broad outcomes that can be shared, without disclosing confidential information, then this can be done.

**11.4 Question from Councillor Asma Islam.**

Can the Mayor and lead member clarify what percentage of the administration's 1000 a year house building target will be for social rent?

**Response from Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding.**

The majority of affordable homes are delivered via the planning process. The current Local Plan has a 35% habitable rooms affordable housing onsite requirement with a tenure split of 70% affordable/social rent and 30% intermediate. We are currently working on a new Local Plan and aim to increase the level of affordable/social rented accommodation delivered through the planning process.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Asma Islam .**

So, it's a question of let's see how we get along then?

**Response from Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding.**

We want to exceed this 70/30 split. We have invested £73million additional funds identified in housing capital at Cabinet. We are looking to increase the split to 80/20 and hope to deliver 1000 council units plus more from other social housing developments.

**11.5 Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed.**

Could the lead member provide an update on the purpose, parameters and processes of the LGA Corporate Peer Review that took place between 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> September?

**Response from Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living.**

LGA Corporate Peer Challenges are coordinated by the Local Government Association on behalf of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The council invited the LGA to carry this out as it has been 5 years since our last full Corporate Peer Challenge and the expectation from government is that these happen on a 5-year cycle.

The Corporate Peer Challenge is an effective and well-regarded sector led improvement tool. By bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of member and officer peers it provides local authorities with robust, credible challenge and support across five core strategic areas:

- Local priorities and outcomes
- Organisational and place leadership
- Governance and culture
- Financial planning and management
- Capacity for improvement

The council will receive a report and come up with an action plan which we will embed into our improvement and transformation work. The LGA will then carry out a progress review 6-8 months after the publication of their report.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed.**

What is the timeline for the first report from the LGA peer review?

**Response from Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living.**

The first report will be in November 2023.

**11.6 Question from Councillor Rachel Blake.**

Could the lead member inform me when residents in Bow East will have their regular food waste collections resume. Residents in my ward and across the borough have spent weeks without collection.

**Response from Councillor Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency.**

Collections of food waste had been disrupted over a number of weeks during the summer and we must apologise for the impact on residents. This was due to an increase in absence from sickness and staff taking a backlog of annual leave. We apologise for the level of disruption and inconvenience this has caused.

Action is being taken to ensure we have sufficient staff cover to maintain collections, with plans being developed to ensure food and waste services are not disrupted due to staff sickness or leave. Post strike action, we expect to be able to deliver this improvement in service, with improved monitoring and follow up of missed collection.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Rachel Blake.**

It's clear the Mayor and lead members have very little real interest in the Environment. I note the Lead members apology to residents of Bow East for the appalling service they have received but will an apology be communicated to the residents of Bow Quarter, Annie Besant Close, Towergate House and Taylor Place, whose waste collection only seems to be collected when ward councillors get involved. What is being done to resolve this issue?

**Response from Councillor Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency.**

Members and residents are encouraged to use the 'Find it, fix it' app to report missing collections. The Mayor has invested £10m in this crisis and £2.1m to improve recycling services. Residents are reminded to download and use the app.

**11.7 Question from Councillor Kamarul Hussain.**

Could the lead member outline how the council is looking to make Workpath more accessible to the residents of Tower hamlets? It is understood plans are being discussed to redesign the service and move it to the new Town Hall in Whitechapel as part of an efficiency and improvement exercise.

**Response from Councillor Wahid Ali, Cabinet member for Jobs, Skills and Growth.**

Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge the hard work of the Workpath team who assist residents in finding employment. With the resident's hub moving into the Town Hall, we have embedded ourselves in the community and have the ability to signpost people and provide a more integrated service.

**11.8 Question from Councillor Amy Lee.**

*Councillor Lee was not present to ask the question, however it was agreed that a written response would be provided to her question.*

**11.9 Question from Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled.**

Following coverage of issues within the council's housing management service, can the lead member provide an update on what steps have been taken to address outstanding issues and how future issues will be addressed?

**Response from Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding.**

Recent media coverage referenced several concerns from staff within the Homelessness Service.

The council takes staff wellbeing seriously and acknowledges that the Homelessness Service has experienced significant pressure in previous months.

- The pressure is being felt London-wide.
- It is related to an increase in the number of approaches from residents for homelessness assistance due to the cost-of-living crisis, families not being able to continue to house family members and an increase in evictions from private rented homes due to the eviction ban, that was in place during Covid, being lifted.
- There is a lack availability of suitable accommodation in and around London.
- In quarter 1 this year only 1.9% of the private rentals in London were at LHA rates.

There are several measures that are in place now to address service pressures and staff wellbeing.

We will continue to monitor service pressures and the impact on staff, and we will adjust service provision in consultation with staff to better meet resident needs and build staff resilience.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled.**

Can you state what measures have been put in place to address the issue.

**Response from Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding.**

Measures in place:

- 22 extra posts being recruited to across the service at all levels to build resilience and extra capacity in the service.
- £600k of ICT investment to consolidate ICT systems, remove bureaucracy, and double entry.
- ICT roadmap identifying improvements that will run in parallel to each other.
- Improved connectivity in the Residents' Hub.
- Quematic queuing system installed in the Residents' Hub.
- Electronic forms to enable signature of legal documents by those in temporary accommodation therefore avoiding a return to the office.
- Revised Homelessness online form now 'live' reducing staff time inputting data.
- Staff wellbeing survey in June 2023 which identified 40 actions to improve staff wellbeing and workflows. These have been actioned with the remaining ones due for action completing end of September 2023

**11.10 Question from Councillor Ayas Miah.**

DVLA statistics show that there has been a drop in the number of low emission vehicles registered in the borough in the last year, despite numbers increasing elsewhere in the country. Could the lead member inform me what the borough is doing to increase the uptake of electric/low emission vehicles and explain why this may not be working?

**Response from Councillor Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency.**

There are three types of charging points – fast, standard and slow charging points. We need to find places to increase the availability of public charging points. The council is working on plans for a significant increase in publicly available charging points in the borough. There are currently 350 public chargers in Tower Hamlets and the plans are for an additional 2000 chargers over the next three years. These include new rapid, fast and standard chargers which will start to be installed in early 2024.

**11.11 Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury.**

Following the momentous launch of free school meals for over 38,000 additional children across tower hamlets - including at secondary level - could the lead member provide an update on what schools, parents and pupils have had to say about the new service?

**Response from Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning.**

Nearly all the schools in the borough now offer free school meals. We have been able to deliver this initiative ahead of the predicted schedule and praise must be given to the commitment and collaboration of headteachers.

The programme was launched at Swanlea School, in front of local and national media and will help support parents during the cost-of-living crisis. The feedback has been positive with schools reporting there had been an uptake in the number of students accessing free school meals.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury.**

The Deputy Mayor and I attended the LGA training course last week and the Council was commended for the introduction of universal Free School meals. Members for other authorities were grateful for this.

**Response from Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning.**

Thank you, Councillor Choudhury. It was a proud moment for the Council and people of this Borough. The initiative and investment were appreciated by members, politicians and officers.

**11.12 Question from Councillor Sabina Akhtar.**

Can the lead member confirm:

- Whether all buildings within the LBTH estate have been surveyed for RAAC (including schools)?
- Can he detail the mitigation measures for where RAAC has been found?
- If surveys have not been completed, can he provide a timeline for their completion?

**Response from Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning.**

Thank you for the question. As you'll be aware this is a national problem and it's important that we seek to keep children and staff safe in the schools, that we operate and maintain.

We are less effected than other local authorities. Stepney All Saints, Church of England is closed at present however the school is in discussion with the DfE. We are keeping a close eye on this situation. Other schools affected are local authority-maintained school Seven Mills, the affected area (main hall) has been closed to pupils with alternative spaces within the school being used for impacted activities.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Sabina Akhtar.**

Stepney All Saints is in my ward. What is the latest update as to when the school can reopen?

**Response from Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning.**

The school and officers of the Council are in negotiations with the DfE. Safety of children and staff is vital. We must ensure the safety of all and as such the school will re-open when it's safe to do so.

**11.13 Question from Cllr Ahmodul Kabir**

Could the lead member provide an update on the ongoing work to address the service issues outlined in the waste emergency declared by the mayor last year?

**Response from Councillor Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency.**

The declaration of a waste emergency by the Mayor was a statement of intent to clean up our borough.

We have started by redesigning the service from within. Plans are underway to improve management and support of front-line teams, re-design collection routes, to continue with investment in greening our fleet, to focus on recycling improvements, to improve standards of street cleansing and target environmental crime such as fly tipping, litter and graffiti. Our plans also include improvements to our commercial waste service. To include a more flexible and reliable waste and recycling offer that meets the needs of customers, with improved on-line ordering / digital account management.

We have re-launched our Find It Fix App and are promoting this widely. This makes it easier to report problems that need action. As we work towards a cleaner borough, it's important for our residents to act as our eyes and ears by reporting street waste using Find It Fix It. We will continue to work with all our staff and front-line teams to ensure a cleaner and greener future for Tower Hamlets.



Questions 11.8 was not put due to the absence of the questioner and Questions 11.14 to 11.27 were not put due to lack of time. The written responses are attached at **Appendix A**.

## **12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

Motion 12.2 was withdrawn by consent of Members through a vote. Motions 12.1 and 12.3 were not considered due to lack of time.

## **13. URGENT MOTION**

### **EMERGENCY MOTION ON THE WASTE STRIKE**

Council considered the urgent motion as printed in the supplementary agenda on the waste strike that had been moved by Councillor Kabir Hussain and seconded by Councillor Maium Talukdar.

Following debate, the motion moved by Councillor Kabir Hussain was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

### **RESOLVED**

#### **Council notes:**

- The good relationship between the present administration and frontline workers, alongside the recognised trade unions of Tower Hamlets Council
- The historical work that Mayor Lutfur Rahman and organised workers in Tower Hamlets have engaged in, and the open, frank and honest dialogue that has always existed between his administrations and the Council's workforce and recognised Trade Unions.
- The invaluable contribution that frontline workers make across Tower Hamlets – from carers to nurses, Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers to refuse workers.
- That during the pandemic – in all conditions – the borough's refuse workers risked their lives to keep the borough's streets clean, sanitary, and safe.
- That they often risked their lives dealing with and disposing off used, contaminated Personal, Protective Equipment (PPE), ensuring that residents of the borough could remain safe from the threat of the Covid-19 virus.
- That many of these workers are on the most precarious and insecure forms of employment – namely agency contracts.
- That when these workers marched on the Town Hall in October last year, they were welcomed and listened to by the Mayor and his

administration, who acknowledged their invaluable contribution in the declaration of a Waste Emergency the following month.

- That these workers' removal of their labour was not an attack on the people of this borough, but a legitimate struggle against a cost-of-living crisis uncaused by them.
- That the resolution of this strike reiterates the good, healthy relationship between the Mayor, the Council, Trade Unions and the workforce.
- That this has been recognised by Unite the Union, who have confirmed that 'Lutfur Rahman played a part in helping to resolve' the recent discussions around pay.
- That this strike has caused immense reputational damage to the Council.

**Council believes:**

- That working people have a right to democratically remove their labour through their Trade Unions, and that the recent strike was a legitimate exercising of this right.
- That the result achieved following constructive negotiations between the frontline workers, their Trade Union (Unite the Union), Council Officers and the Mayor's Office demonstrates what can be achieved when respective parties sit down and treat one another with courtesy, dignity and respect.
- That the ending of the strike demonstrates that there are cohesive, productive and robust relationships across the council, and how open dialogue and frank discussions can lead to resolutions and results.
- That where possible, all workers should be guaranteed the right to stable, secure work as and when they want it.
- That Mayor Lutfur Rahman has always looked to secure such employ for working people across Tower Hamlets – whether in the Leisure Service, Care Service and now in the Council's refuse services.

**Council resolves:**

- To reaffirm its commitment to support the deal struck between frontline workers and the Council yesterday.
- To recognise the role that the Mayor and officers played in the successful negotiation of the end of this strike.
- To confirm the insourcing of agency workers in the refuse service onto in-house council contracts.
- To support frontline workers and to continue to work with the Council's trade unions to support workers in the service.
- To work with officers, partners and stakeholders to address the Council's reputational damage.

The meeting ended at 10.09 p.m.

Speaker of the Council

This page is intentionally left blank

### Item 11: Member Questions and Answers

<p>11.1</p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Amin Rahman</b></p>	<p>Could the lead member provide an update on the status of the council’s outstanding accounts requiring sign off? These accounts were left unsigned for many years under the previous administration.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The 2016/17 and 2017/18 accounts had their certificates issued by KPMG in March 2023, so these years are now completed.</p> <p>For 2018/19 and 2019/20 accounts, the audits are close to completion in terms of the number of significant issues being investigated, there being only one remaining.</p> <p>This outstanding significant issue relates to the actuarial valuation of the Pension Fund for the historical period in question and the resulting entries that then need to be applied to the accounts. At the time of drafting this response, officers continue to work their way through the discrepancies (which numbered in their thousands) and are on track to complete this task within the required timeframe to allow Deloitte some time to review the findings. Their actuarial expert estimated a period of 2 further weeks would be required (after all council responses are complete and provided to them).</p> <p>The Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer will be meeting with Deloitte within the coming week to establish a clear commitment and assurance regarding Deloitte ability to resource the process to achieve timelines required for November Audit Committee approval and to ensure a smooth handover to our newly appointed auditors Ernst &amp;Young</p> <p>A further meeting has been diarised for 2nd October at a senior operational level to ensure the outcome of the above meeting translates to an agreed achievable timeline for the November Audit Committee to approve the accounts.</p> <p>The 2020/21 accounts were first produced, as draft, in January 2022 (and presented to Audit Cttee). As a result of learning arising from the ongoing audits of 2018/19 and 2019/20, a second version of the 2020/21 accounts was presented to Deloitte in March 2023, and audit began in July.</p> <p>Audit has been ongoing since July, and there are indications of a far better engagement and performance from officers than in previous years; however, officers will acknowledge that there is still further work to do, and there may still be some difficulties ahead, although at the most recent high-level meeting with the Deloitte</p>
-------------	--	---

		<p>partner, the Senior Audit Manager stated that, despite having noted a few errors, he hadn't noted anything yet which he would consider alarming.</p> <p>Officers are conscious that some errors are being identified, and it will be necessary to produce a third version of the 2020/21 accounts.</p> <p>As each year's accounts move closer to finalisation, there is a great deal of learning that then needs to be applied to subsequent years. Officers are pro-actively applying these improvements, with the aim of them being reflected in future years' accounts at first publication. [As a result, the 2021/22 and 2022/23 accounts have not been produced yet.]</p>
11.2	<p><b>Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin</b></p>	<p>When will the Mayor be in a position to communicate the outcome of his review of the council's asset portfolio? Many organisations are left in limbo, including those waiting 18 months for decisions on meanwhile use properties, and in my ward, lease renewals for the Mudchute and operators for Island Gardens café.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The review of transactions is an ongoing process, and transactions are progressing following completion of reviews. Some cases are more complex than others, and outcomes will be communicated once all the issues have been considered. The decisions on the two specific cases mentioned have been completed and the relevant organisations are being informed.</p>
11.3	<p><b>Question from Councillor Musthak Ahmed</b></p>	<p>Can the lead member share the findings of the independent investigation into housing management following the complaint brought by 31 members of staff in the department?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Thank you for raising this matter with us.</p> <p>This matter has yet not been finalised but has been progressed following our internal procedures. At this stage it would not be appropriate to share any details on this matter given that it relates to confidential staffing matters. Once the matter has been concluded, and if there are broad outcomes that can be shared, without disclosing confidential information, then this can be done.</p> <p>However, members can be reassured that this matter has been given the priority it deserves, and all parties supported throughout the process.</p>

11.4	<b>Question from Councillor Asma Islam</b>	<p>Can the Mayor and lead member clarify what percentage of the administration's 1000 a year house building target will be for social rent?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The majority of affordable homes are delivered via the planning process. The current Local Plan has a 35% habitable rooms affordable housing onsite requirement with a tenure split of 70% affordable/social rent and 30% intermediate. We are currently working on a new Local Plan and aim to increase the level of affordable/social rented accommodation delivered through the planning process.</p>
11.5	<b>Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed</b>	<p>Could the lead member provide an update on the purpose, parameters and processes of the LGA Corporate Peer Review that took place between 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> September?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>LGA Corporate Peer Challenges are coordinated by the Local Government Association on behalf of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The council invited the LGA to carry this out as it has been 5 years since our last full Corporate Peer Challenge and the expectation from government is that these happen on a 5 year cycle.</p> <p>The Corporate Peer Challenge is an effective and well-regarded sector led improvement tool. By bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of member and officer peers it provides local authorities with robust, credible challenge and support across five core strategic areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local priorities and outcomes</li> <li>• Organisational and place leadership</li> <li>• Governance and culture</li> <li>• Financial planning and management</li> <li>• Capacity for improvement</li> </ul> <p>The council will receive a report and come up with an action plan which we will embed into our improvement and transformation work. The LGA will then carry out a progress review 6-8 months after the publication of their report.</p>
11.6	<b>Question from Councillor Rachel Blake</b>	<p>Could the lead member inform me when residents in Bow East will have their regular food waste collections resume. Residents in my ward and across the borough have spent weeks without collection.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p>

		<p>Collections of food waste had been disrupted over a number of weeks during the summer and we must apologise for the impact on residents. This was due to an increase in absence from sickness and staff taking a backlog of annual leave. We apologise for the level of disruption and inconvenience this has caused.</p> <p>Action is being taken to ensure we have sufficient staff cover to maintain collections, with plans being developed to ensure food and waste services are not disrupted due to staff sickness or leave. Post strike action, we expect to be able to deliver this improvement in service, with improved monitoring and follow up of missed collection.</p>
11.7	<p><b>Question from Councillor Kamrul Hussain</b></p>	<p>Could the lead member outline how the council is looking to make Workpath more accessible to the residents of Tower hamlets? It is understood plans are being discussed to redesign the service and move it to the new Town Hall in Whitechapel as part of an efficiency and improvement exercise.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Workpath is accessible to the public via online registration, by face to face and online appointment, via drop-in and via the Residents' Hub at the Town Hall. All the planned Residents Hubs across the borough will be supported by Workpath in the same way.</p> <p>Discussions are underway to move the service to the Town Hall for a variety of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To make it easier for residents to access multiple strands of support from one site, including via the Residents Hub.</li> <li>• To reduce the number of council satellite offices and thus reduce service charge costs.</li> <li>• To support officers in partnership working with colleagues.</li> <li>• To help officers feel more integrated with colleagues across the council and have better access to the Town Hall facilities.</li> </ul> <p>Along with all council services, Workpath's delivery processes and priorities are being reviewed to ensure they deliver the Mayor's pledges; in this instance to develop the social capital of residents, support young people from all walks of life and young people with specific needs or characteristics including SEND and care experience, supporting women and in particular women from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds who are particularly under-represented in the labour market. Proposals will also consider a programme of in-work progression to help tackle the cost of living crisis, and will focus on specific key themes and growth sectors such as: green skills, tech and creative industries, health and social care and sciences.</p>



		Currently around 58% of programmes funding is S106 or external contract or commercial funding, and this drive to minimise the use of General Fund will continue.
11.8	<b>Question from Councillor Amy Lee</b>	Residents are concerned about proposed changes to leisure services and the impact this will have on them. Can the lead member outline plans, for John Orwell Sports Centre and provide reassurance to residents that the service they receive will not diminish?  <b>Response</b>  There will be a priority to ensure a continuity of service, alongside an improved leisure offer with new services, products, and infrastructure as services are bought back in house. The new service will forge strong links with other council services, public health, and key stakeholders with a focus on improving the health and wellbeing of residents benefiting those hard-to-reach communities, such as BAME women and SEND children, as well as current users.
11.9	<b>Question from Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled</b>	Following coverage of issues within the council's housing management service, can the lead member provide an update on what steps have been taken to address outstanding issues and how future issues will be addressed?  <b>Response</b>  Recent media coverage referenced several concerns from staff within the Homelessness Service.  The council takes staff wellbeing seriously and acknowledges that the Homelessness Service has experienced significant pressure in previous months.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pressure is being felt London-wide.</li> <li>• It is related to an increase in the number of approaches from residents for homelessness assistance due to the cost-of-living crisis, families not being able to continue to house family members and an increase in evictions from private rented homes due to the eviction ban, that was in place during Covid, being lifted.</li> <li>• There is a lack availability of suitable accommodation in and around London.</li> <li>• In quarter 1 this year only 1.9% of the private rentals in London were at LHA rates.</li> </ul>

There are several measures that are in place now to address service pressures and staff wellbeing.

We will continue to monitor service pressures and the impact on staff, and we will adjust service provision in consultation with staff to better meet resident needs and build staff resilience.

Measures in place:

- 22 extra posts being recruited to across the service at all levels to build resilience and extra capacity in the service.
- £600k of ICT investment to consolidate ICT systems, remove bureaucracy, and double entry.
- ICT roadmap identifying improvements that will run in parallel to each other.
- Improved connectivity in the Residents' Hub.
- Quematic queuing system installed in the Residents' Hub.
- Electronic forms to enable signature of legal documents by those in temporary accommodation therefore avoiding a return to the office.
- Revised Homelessness online form now 'live' reducing staff time inputting data.
- Staff wellbeing survey in June 2023 which identified 40 actions to improve staff wellbeing and workflows. These have been actioned with the remaining ones due for action completing end of September 2023
- Re-configuring triage/first point of contact to ensure the best customer service possible and eliminate the failure rate to address a query at first point of contact, reducing long waits for residents and repeat work for staff.
- Increasing the availability of temporary accommodation and private rented accommodation, e.g., the recent poster campaign to attract landlords, followed up by the Landlords Fare on 26th October at the Grocer's Wing.
- Onboarding of new accommodation providers.
- Reaching out to developers and RPs with unsold sale units.

Service Improvement Group meeting every two weeks to address workflows. Staff representatives are invited.

**11.10** **Question from Councillor Ayas Miah**

DVLA statistics show that there has been a drop in the number of low emission vehicles registered in the borough in the last year, despite numbers increasing elsewhere in the country. Could the lead member inform me what the borough is doing to increase the uptake of electric/low emission vehicles and explain why this may not be working?

**Response**

The overall number of low emission vehicles registered in the borough has increased over the past 12 months, maintaining the trends in growth seen over the past 5 years. The council is committed to delivering an ambitious expansion of the electric vehicle charger network and this investment in the charging infrastructure will continue to facilitate further growth in electric vehicle ownership in the borough. The council’s electric vehicle charger programme is informed from demand monitored from existing chargers and new requests submitted via the [dedicated charger request webpage](#)

- Total registered low emission vehicles in Tower Hamlets has shown an increase of 2% in the past year - from 3545 (2022 Q1) to 3610 (2023 Q1).
- One of the key challenges to increasing the uptake of low emission vehicles is the availability of public charging points.
- The council is working on plans for a significant increase in publicly available charging points in the borough.
- There are currently 350 public chargers in Tower Hamlets and the plans are for an additional 2000 chargers over the next three years.
- These include new rapid, fast and standard chargers which will start to be installed in early 2024.

**Car Ownership Data**

All registered company vehicles	2023 Q1	2022 Q1	Change
Tower Hamlets	8980	9015	-35

All registered private vehicles	2023 Q1	2022 Q1	Change
Tower Hamlets	45566	46101	-535

All registered vehicles	2023 Q1	2022 Q1	Change
Tower Hamlets	54546	55116	-570

**11.11 Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury**

Following the momentous launch of free school meals for over 38,000 additional children across tower hamlets - including at secondary level - could the lead member provide an update on what schools, parents and pupils have had to say about the new service?

**Response**

A successful launch event of universal free school meals for secondary schools in Tower Hamlets took place at Swanlea School, with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and local and national media in attendance.

Ms Brenda Landers, Headteacher at Swanlea, said: 'Fifty per cent of our students used to get free school meals anyway, but this is about the next layer of pupils who we call the working poor, and they are the group that are traditionally not eligible for free school meals that massively struggle to provide their child with a meal. Will having a good meal make students learn better? Yes. Will I ever be able to link it to better GCSEs and A-Levels? Almost certainly not. The children will eat good food and have a hot meal, and that's enough. In a country as wealthy as Britain, no child should be going to bed hungry. It's a disgrace. and this is part of the solution to that.'

Secondary School headteachers have worked effectively in partnership with the Council to deliver the Free School Meals scheme as quickly as possible, and report success in the initial roll out, despite the logistical challenges posed for some schools.

Pupils at Morpeth School have been excited about the initiative. This enthusiasm has led to an increase in the take-up of meals; secondary headteachers at a recent consultative meeting reported a similar trend in their schools. Following the positive feedback from schools, the Council is extending its support to schools over the next few months to deal with minor remaining logistical issues. There have been approximately 30 recorded positive media coverage across national, local, and the sector press.

**11.12 Question from Councillor Sabina Akhtar**

Can the lead member confirm:

- Whether all buildings within the LBTH estate have been surveyed for RAAC (including schools)?
- Can he detail the mitigation measures for where RAAC has been found?
- If surveys have not been completed, can he provide a timeline for their completion?

**Response**

The team are currently reviewing the position in relation to RAAC, which was commonly used in schools and other buildings from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. It is mainly found in flat roofs, although occasionally in floors and walls. The team are

therefore concentrating on buildings in this date range and essentially in its flat roof construction.

In the absence of drawings or other records/data, an initial internal visual inspection will be necessary to establish the roof construction. If found to contain RAAC panels, then a follow up survey will be arranged with a Structural Engineer.

All Local Authority Maintained Schools that were within scope against the DFE Guidance (flat roofs and 1950-1990) were subject to a desktop review and subsequent surveying report.

The guidance has subsequently changed post 31<sup>st</sup> August 23 with an increase in the impacted years into mid 90's, therefore a review to assess if any further schools are in scope is being undertaken at pace.

RAAC has been identified at one local authority maintained school Seven Mills, the affected area (main hall) has been closed to pupils with alternative spaces within the school being used for impacted activities. A scheme to provide temporary propping to bring the hall back into use whilst undertaking full removal is being undertaken with an anticipated completion date of December 2023.

RAAC has further been identified at two non Local Authority Maintained schools where the borough's children are educated. Mulberry Academy Stepney Green, RAAC is located within the hall which has been cordoned off and temporary arrangements put in place. Stepney All Saints Church of England School- RAAC is located at numerous locations within the site and the DFE changed its advice to the school resulting in closure of the entire site on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September, with the whole school currently using online learning. Mitigation for bringing the whole school back to in person teaching as quickly as possible is being progressed with the DFE.

It is generally understood that RAAC was not used for buildings originally built as residential homes.

There are approximately 244 residential blocks of flats owned by the council that meet the age, height and flat roof criteria for RAAC. THH is not aware that any of these contain RAAC and have not previously identified this when replacing flat roofs to blocks built around this time.

A small number of surveys will be carried out later this year and next year to target those blocks which may have unusual attributes e.g., office block converted to residential.

Further surveys and a programme of testing roof structures is to be planned based on outcome of existing or planned surveying and sampling roof structures and to

		<p>ensure LBTH has account of any buildings at risk of having RAAC within the design.</p> <p>To date no RAAC has been found in LBTH housing stock.</p>
11.13	<p><b>Question from Councillor Ahmodul Kabir</b></p>	<p>Could the lead member provide an update on the ongoing work to address the service issues outlined in the waste emergency declared by the mayor last year?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The declaration of a waste emergency by the Mayor was a statement of intent to clean up our borough.</p> <p>We have started by redesigning the service from within. Plans are underway to improve management and support of front-line teams, re-design collection routes, to continue with investment in greening our fleet, to focus on recycling improvements, to improve standards of street cleansing and target environmental crime such as fly tipping, litter and graffiti. Our plans also include improvements to our commercial waste service. To include a more flexible and reliable waste and recycling offer that meets the needs of customers, with improved on-line ordering / digital account management.</p> <p>We have re-launched our Find It Fix App and are promoting this widely. This makes it easier to report problems that need action. As we work towards a cleaner borough, it's important for our residents to act as our eyes and ears by reporting street waste using Find It Fix It. We will continue to work with all of our staff and front-line teams to ensure a cleaner and greener future for Tower Hamlets.</p>
11.14	<p><b>Question from Councillor Shubo Hussein</b></p>	<p>What are the future plans for the LBTH community hubs? Residents in Bromley South have been informed that their community hub has been closed as the council decided not to renew the lease.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The implementation of the strategy agreed by the previous administration to secure hub operates and grant leases has been paused pending a review. The only exception to this is Granby Hall. As to the remaining hub the council's strategy has yet to be confirmed.</p>

		<p>With regards to the Bromley South Community Hub this lease was declined for renewal by Poplar HARCA. An open day/meeting for the previous community groups who were using the site is being arranged.</p>
<p><b>11.15</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Abdul Mannan</b></p>	<p>Following complaints from across the community about the effectiveness of drug treatment services in the borough, can the lead member outline what is being done to tackle heroin and crack cocaine addiction which has been an issue in Tower Hamlets for so long.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>We have established a World Class System Improvement Group with all Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Provider and wider system partners to deliver and sustain improvement and enhancement in this area. This group will report into the Combatting Drugs Partnership. Chaired by The Director of Public health with oversight of the current challenges and performance, delivery will focus on ensuring more people access treatment and that once they access their treatment journey is successful and results in long terms recovery.</p> <p>Over the last 3 months we have worked with the current treatment Provider to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the numbers accessing treatment services, from 1800 to 1950 with an aim to increase this to 2300 by the end of the financial year.</li> <li>• Reduced the length of time that people wait to begin treatment from 6 weeks to 6 days.</li> <li>• Reduced the caseloads carried by staff at the treatment service to improve the access into services.</li> </ul> <p>Over the next 3 months we are focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing the outcomes for individuals and their overall effectiveness of services</li> <li>• Enhancing our recovery services, commissioning a community based culturally appropriate recovery service by January of 2024.</li> <li>• Delivery of a rapid prescribing model</li> <li>• Increasing our community-based resource for treatment and recovery</li> <li>• Introduction of an Assessment Team – to speed up assessment and prescription at the “front door”.</li> <li>• Introduction of Buvidal as a new form of treatment</li> <li>• Deploying additional capacity for engagement and outreach</li> </ul>

11.16	<b>Question from Councillor Asma Begum</b>	<p>Over the past months residents in this borough have spent weeks without their bins being collected, could the lead member tell me whether specific measures are being taken to clear the backlog of missed collections?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>We have seen an increase in complaints in July and August linked to service disruption. This is largely due to increased numbers of staff on annual leave, or absent due to sickness. We have worked to clear reported missed collections as quickly as possible, but some areas have experienced longer delays clearing any backlogs. Action was taken to deploy additional resources to clear missed collections, but strike action has disrupted this work. Our improvement plans cover service re-design, improved resource planning, performance management, supervision and quality control. We are working to improve the use of our missed collection reporting and performance management system, combined with plans to improve management of staff absence, reducing use of agency staff.</p>
11.17	<b>Question from Councillor Ahmodur Khan</b>	<p>Following on from the administration’s motion, could the lead member explain how the council pursues best value when disposing of council owned assets?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Tower Hamlets Council adheres to best value by following the process laid out within the clearly laid out “Property Procedures for Disposals and Lettings.”</p> <p>The Procedure is available at agenda item 6.9 here:  <a href="https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=720&amp;MId=10191">https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=720&amp;MId=10191</a></p>
11.18	<b>Question from Councillor Rebakah Sultana</b>	<p>A recent study found that young women in tower hamlets are four times more likely to be hospitalised for self-harm than their Male counterparts – could the lead member inform me whether there are any specific programmes or workstreams concerned with women’s mental health?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Tower Hamlets Suicide Prevention Strategy 2023-2026 has an aim to reduce self-harm as a risk factor for suicide, and priority actions to address this aim.</p> <p>Increasing access to services where people can receive support with emotional needs related to self-harm is a key aim of our Strategy and we have commissioned a range of services that provide support for women in their mental health:</p>



- **East London Foundation Trust** has a range of services to support mental health and wellbeing including:
  - Tower Hamlets Talking Therapies for people with depression and/or anxiety;
  - Crisis services (24/7 crisis telephone line, crisis emergency response team, home treatment team, crisis therapy service)
  - Tower Hamlets Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
  - Tower Hamlets Early Detection Service and Tower Hamlets Early Intervention Service
  
- **The Safe Connections Community Hub** is delivered by Mind, telephone-based tailored support for people 18+ to access if experiencing suicidal ideation or self-harm
- **Together Café** (drop in service for people at risk of mental health crisis to attend out of hours).
- **Mind Community Connections** : information, advice and support delivered to people experiencing mental health issues, delivering a range of recovery and service user led programmes including those for women at risk of self-harm. They also offer access to the Sakina project – funded through National MIND to support access and engagement for diverse Muslim women in the borough.
- **Recovery college; delivered by ELFT**, offer a range of training and sessions focused on educating and raising awareness around mental health. The recovery college has previously offered specific programmes for women including a Somali Women’s Cooking Workshop – sessions to be delivered in both Somali and English, and also, ‘Women in Islam’ for Bengali Women.
- **Kooth** is a free and anonymous online community that supports individuals with mental health and wellbeing. Contributions to the community are made by writing stories and creative work, as well as taking part in community discussions, and you can also chat live with mental health professionals who are available 365 days a year.

Additional actions include increasing awareness and adoption of the best practice guidance among organisations and partners across Tower Hamlets (i.e., the 2022 NICE Guidelines for Assessment, Management and Preventing Recurrence) as well as promoting the uptake of funded training opportunities about how to support people who self-harm (offered by Tower Hamlets Community Education Provider Network).

*Note:*

Between April 2019 and March 2023, there were 3,300 incidents of self-harm attendances to A&E by 2,500 distinct patients in Tower Hamlets. These incidents

		<p>have been decreasing each quarter since the start 2022. The highest rate of self-harm attendances to A&amp;E is among people aged 13-19 years old, 55.4% were female patients while 44.6% were male. This variation appears to be mainly among people 24 years old and younger: females make up 64% of attendances and males make up 36% of attendances for this age group.</p>
11.19	<p><b>Question from Councillor Harun Miah</b></p>	<p>The Mayor has overseen several housing away days. Could the lead member explain what progress has been made in these sessions, and how it will help to tackle the ongoing issue of overcrowding in the borough?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>The Mayor holds Housing Awaydays with a number of officers working on delivering rented homes for the Council. The meetings afford the opportunity for the Mayor and Lead Member to work closely and in detail with the Chief Executive and officers to identify development opportunities and to monitor progress on existing schemes. Particular attention is given to increasing the number of larger homes to reduce overcrowding.</p>
11.20	<p><b>Question from Councillor Amina Ali</b></p>	<p>Could the lead member provide an update on the progress of operation continuum? Since 2022 how many operation continuum events have taken place?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Operation Continuum is the Council's close partnership with the Police to tackle the sale and supply of drugs. Since its inception in Dec 2017, it has been successful in tackling the supply of drugs and is responsible for securing the successful Addiction Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement, Recovery (ADDER) funding and Programme. This Programme is now rolled out by the Met Police as best practice across London.</p> <p>OP Continuum 2022/23 to date has led to 18 days of action resulting in: 114 Warrants have been executed, 112 people arrested and 72 charged with drugs trafficking offences, £200,000 cash seized and 347 weapons recovered.</p> <p>In addition, we are focussed on drugs addresses and venues involved in sale and supply. Recently resulting in several premises closures in the area of Commercial Street. A number of warrants have been conducted recently which resulted in a large quantity of drugs seized and Closure notices issued for properties.</p> <p><i>Footnote for information</i>  <i>The force is unable to release the data for the total number of drugs related arrests and drugs trafficking charges due to the roll out of their new IT</i></p>

*system Connect in Nov. Between April and November there have been 712 arrests for drugs supply related offences, an average of 3 a day.*

**11.21** **Question from Councillor James King**

Over the summer concerned parents contacted Labour councillors because they were informed that the council was withdrawing funding from district sports teams and their children could no longer attend sessions – could the lead member confirm whether the council did withdraw funding from sports clubs in the borough, if so why and if not then commit to investigate as to why some parents believed this to be the case?

**Response**

The funding for the district sport programme came to an end at the start of the financial year in April 2023. Considering the significant savings that need to be made, The Council is currently reviewing the school sport offer, including the district sport programme, and how it can be effectively delivered in the future. The Council is extremely ambitious for young people and sport in the borough.

It has invested £13.7 million in Youth Services, which will be offering an exciting youth sport curriculum. The Council is also investing in sport & leisure by bringing its leisure service in house and rebuilding St. George's Leisure Centre, all of which will involve exciting opportunities for young people to be actively involved in sport and physical activity. In addition, Government has made considerable financial contributions to school sport via the PE Sport Premium, School Games, and other funding streams. Consequently, there may be more appropriate, innovative, and exciting ways to deliver district sport in the future, through existing investments being made.

Unfortunately, it appears that there has been some confusion with parents about this issue. Sports clubs are not responsible for the delivery of the district sport programme and The Council has not withdrawn funding from sports clubs

**11.22** **Question from Councillor Abdal Ullah**

Could the lead member for community safety inform me whether the council is aware of the frequent disruption residents in Wapping are facing from young men choosing to use the streets of the borough as a race circuit – often these illegal race meets leave nitrous oxide canisters littering the street. Could the lead member meet with me to discuss the installation of speed humps/noise monitoring equipment as a means of getting to grips with the issue?

**Response**

The council is aware of these issues being faced by residents in Wapping. The Council has very limited legal powers to deal with vehicle nuisance. These are

police powers. We work in partnership with the Police and are providing support to them to reduce the problem and the impact on residents.

Speeding and traffic enforcement is the responsibility of the Police and TFL under their "Vision Zero" policy. The council assists the local Police where possible in carrying out this work.

We have purchased three handheld speed guns and recently had them calibrated for use by the local Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Local officers are being trained in their use to enable them to use them across the borough, and key locations such as Wapping.

Standard speed cameras that are approved to enforce by issuing fines and points are only installed by the Police and TFL in response to a serious accidents.

Dangerous driving has to be witnessed by a Police Officer or through footage showing the registration number for action to be taken. Nuisance driving can be dealt with in several ways depending on the severity but only the police have the power to act on this.

In relation to loud vehicles and modified exhausts, unfortunately noise made by vehicles is exempt from the Environmental Protection Act. The only legislation that covers this issue is the "Road Vehicles (Construction and Use Regulations) 1986" There are two sections in this legislation which cover the noise issue:

- Silencer/ exhaust system altered to increase noise – Reg. 54(2) The Road Vehicles (Construction & Use) Regulations 1986.
- Avoidance of excessive noise – Reg. 97 The Road Vehicles (Construction & Use) Regulations 1986

Again, this is something only the Police can legitimately deal with. We understand that it requires specially mechanically trained Police Officers to stop and deal with the vehicle.

The Met Police have a Traffic Team who specialist in dealing with nuisance vehicles and drivers (NVT). This team all specialize in traffic offences, and most officers are also mechanically trained to be able to inspect vehicles for modifications. Last month we signed off a local agreement and provided some funding for them to carry out additional work in Tower Hamlets in the form of evening patrols and major ANPR operations to target problem vehicles that are impacting on our resident's quality of life. To date they have carried out three patrol type operations and one large operation - predominately focused in Wapping to deal with the "car meets" and

		<p>vehicle racing. So far, over 150 sec 59 notices have been issued by the NVT during these operations.</p> <p>Working with the police traffic team has highlighted the ability to use legislation called a "Section 59 Notice " <a href="https://legislation.gov.uk">Police Reform Act 2002 (legislation.gov.uk)</a> This legislation can be used by local Police Officers and PCSOs to deal with nuisance vehicles. We have arranged for a training session to be carried out by the traffic team to provide our local police officers with more knowledge about the S59 notice and when it can be used.</p> <p>We encourage residents and councillors to access the below link to formally report nuisance vehicles to the Metropolitan Police. It allows residents to upload evidence of nuisance vehicles so they can assess it and take follow up action as necessary. We are encouraging residents to utilise this function wherever possible. <a href="#">Vehicle nuisance involving cars, bikes and mopeds   Metropolitan Police</a></p> <p>We are working with the Highways Team to carry out an assessment of the key locations in Wapping to assess the need and options for dealing with nuisance vehicles through changes in the road layouts at the location.</p>
11.23	<p><b>Question from Councillor Faroque Ahmed</b></p>	<p>Could the lead member confirm whether GLL is cancelling reciprocal arrangements ahead of schedule for residents in this borough ahead of leisure services coming in house – residents in the borough have been in touch with me over the summer to say that they were denied access to other GLL facilities.</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>GLL still operate the contract until 31<sup>st</sup> April 2024 and so their memberships that are all inclusive and remain so.</p> <p>We have developed a business plan that allows residents who have a membership to use any of the facilities across the borough, however after May 1<sup>st</sup> 2024 will no longer be able to access other GLL facilities. Residents of Tower Hamlets will also receive a discount for membership or pay as you go sessions. The new service will forge strong links with other council services, public health, and key stakeholders with a focus on improving the health and wellbeing of residents benefiting those hard-to-reach communities, such as BAME women and SEND children, as well as current users.</p>
11.24	<p><b>Question from Councillor</b></p>	<p>Tower Hamlets has coped much better than other London boroughs from cuts to local government funding because of business rate income it collected from Canary Wharf's banks and services. Home to 30 office buildings and 120,000 office workers.</p>

	<p><b>Sabina Khan</b></p>	<p>Office workers socialise Canary Wharf buildings. The area has more than 300 retailers as well as eight supermarkets more than 70 restaurants and bars, and a cinema. There is a big exodus coming from Canary Wharf now. High profile businesses are moving out of Canary Wharf, in July 2023 HSBC said it's moving its global headquarters out of Canary Wharf tower and to the city of London the Dockland has one of the highest office vacancy rate in London at 15.5 percentage, according to data provider Costar.</p> <p>What is council doing to retain and attract global businesses in Canary Wharf? Has the council modelled scenarios or planned for further exits from Canary Wharf and assessed whether there are risks to the council and residents?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>While Canary Wharf will continue to play an important role in the economy of Tower Hamlets (and London and the UK) by providing a range of office spaces, through the development of our new Local Plan, we are seeking to support increased flexibility to allow new types of uses into the area.</p> <p>We are also supporting high-density residential development around the fringes of Canary Wharf, including in Wood Wharf, which is evolving into a mixed-use community. The increased residential presence around the Canary Wharf estate will support the shops, cafes and restaurants and allow the estate to play more of a town centre role for the people living on the Isle of Dogs.</p>
<p><b>11.25</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Sirajul Islam</b></p>	<p>Will the Mayor be able to update me on the ongoing negotiations between himself and TfL regarding LIP and any other funding that is being withheld from the borough?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>There is ongoing discussion between officers and TfL representatives on the detail of LIP allocation for LBTH, I have arranged meeting with senior officials with TfL that is due to take place in October 2023.</p>
<p><b>11.26</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Peter Golds</b></p>	<p>Residents in many parts of the Isle of Dogs including Lockesfield Place, Masthouse Terrace, Midland Estate, Livingstone Place and Crews Street have, in a short period, registered a significant number of complaints about the collection of food and organic waste. All to no avail, despite logging them via the website and the telephone systems.</p> <p>Will the Mayor give an assurance that this problem will be resolved?</p>

		<p><b>Response</b></p> <p>We have seen an increase in complaints in July and August linked to service disruption. This is largely due to increased numbers of staff on annual leave, or absent due to sickness. We have worked to clear reported missed collections as quickly as possible, but some areas have experienced longer delays clearing any backlogs. Action was taken to deploy additional resources to clear missed collections, but strike action has disrupted this work. Our improvement plans cover service re-design, improved resource planning, performance management, supervision and quality control. We are working to improve the use of our missed collection reporting and performance management system, combined with plans to improve management of staff absence, reducing use of agency staff. Post strike action we expect to deliver improved monitoring and follow up of missed collection complaints. We are working to ensure our customer care, communication and complaint follow improves.</p>
11.27	<p><b>Question from Councillor Nathalie Bienfait</b></p>	<p>Could data be provided on how many homes in Tower Hamlets fail the Decent Homes Standard, split by ward?</p> <p><b>Response</b></p> <p>Data is not available for the number of homes that fail the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) by ward. Whilst not disaggregated at ward level, the English Housing Survey highlights that across Tower Hamlets 13.9% of all rented homes were classified as non-decent compared to 15.3% across Waltham Forest, 14.7% in Hackney and 14.2% in Southwark. It also highlights that the private rented sector has slightly higher proportions of non-decent homes across all LAs while the social rented sector had the lowest.</p> <p>Decent Homes Standard is currently only applicable to the social housing sector and the government has committed to review the Decent Homes Standard and to extend it to the private rented sector, as stated in the Renters (Reform) Bill (2023)</p> <p>The council has a range of means of using the above information and more local sources of information which relate specifically to DHS within its own housing stock and other housing providers and across the private rented sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• THH</li> </ul> <p>THH uses an external independent survey company that conducts stock condition surveys (SCS) on a rolling five-yearly basis. The SCS covers external and communal areas of buildings and internal surveys on a per-block basis. The SCSs</p>

identify any defective elements of buildings such as roofs, rainwater and foul water drainage and this information is used to prioritise and plan stock investment.

- THHF

Tower Hamlets Housing Forum is a partnership between the council and the main Registered Providers with stock in the borough. A key aim of the Forum is to raise housing management standards across the borough. As part of its governance structure there is an Asset Management subgroup whose focus is to examine and report on the condition of existing stock and ensure Providers are up to date with existing and emerging legislation affecting the condition of their homes and estates and are taking the appropriate steps to rectify any highlighted shortcomings identified.

- Social Housing Regulation

Working groups have been established within THH and across THHF to meet provisions contained within the Social Housing Regulation Act which has a key focus around housing conditions and decent homes. The Act will enable a new proactive approach to regulating social housing landlords, by ensuring better homes for those who live in social housing, greater transparency for tenants - with the Regulator able to intervene where social landlords fail to meet expected standards – fundamentally, it intends to drive reform to change landlord's behaviour.

As part of the new regulatory regime introduced by the RSH, RPs will be expected to report on the number of homes classified as non-decent on an annual basis. This data will be collected and reported to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee on a six-monthly basis to ensure Members are kept abreast of the how RPs are progressing whilst providing opportunity to challenge underperformance and maintain oversight of the issues impacting service delivery to residents.

- PRS

The council operates various types of licensing schemes across the borough (Mandatory, Additional and Selective) to ensure that private landlords, and the properties that they let do not pose a risk to the welfare or safety of persons occupying the property.

We also have developed a Private Renters Charter which sets out standards that the law demands from all private landlords and agents. These standards include aspects such as: deposit protection, fair tenancy, ban on tenant fee's, gas safety and free from damp and mould to name a few.

- Housing Enforcement

The council has a duty to review local housing conditions and identify appropriate action that may be required across properties which may be hazardous.

Following a service request or complaint about poor housing conditions from any resident within the private or social rented sector, council officers will undertake a review with an initial risk assessment will normally be carried out. The council will take further action to deal with health and safety concerns or issues which cause a statutory nuisance. While being proportionate in our response to illegal activity and



		<p>would prefer to resolve issues informally, if possible, where landlords do not engage with us or there is a blatant disregard for the law putting the safety of tenants at risk enforcement action is taken to ensure statutory health and safety concerns are remediated.</p>
--	--	---

This page is intentionally left blank