

Public Pack

COUNCIL, 08/05/2024

SECTION ONE (UNRESTRICTED)

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL

HELD AT 7.04 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 8 MAY 2024

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 Maisha Begum (Member)	Councillor Abdul Malik (Member)
Councillor Nathalie Bienfait (Member)	Councillor Abdul Mannan (Member)
Councillor Rachel Blake (Member)	Councillor Ana 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 12.1 (Motion on Tower Hamlets- A Go-to Borough) was taken after Agenda Item 7 (Administration Motion for Debate). Agenda Item 8 (Opposition Motion for Debate) followed thereafter.

Council also adjourned for a 15-minute prayer break at 20:48 to 21:04 in between Item 12.1 and Item 8.

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

The Speaker of the Council provided his update to the Council. He noted that he had attended several events, including an art exhibition showcasing artwork of secondary school pupils, as well as participating in sport awards, book launches and citizenship ceremonies. Other highlights included:

- Attending Iftar meals during the holy month of Ramadan;
- Hosting the Lord Mayor and his visit to Billingsgate market for the annual rent payment ceremony;
- Commemorating Altab Ali day; and
- Meeting the winners of the Civic Awards at a ceremony held in early April.

Finally, the Speaker congratulated Councillor Iqbal Hossain, Alibor Choudhury, from the Mayor's Office, Raadiyah Hussain and Ethan Cowles from Supporting Families as well as other staff and residents who took part in the London Marathon.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Amy Lee and Councillor Asma Begum.

Councillor Asma Begum and Councillor Ayas Miah joined the meeting online.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

Cllr Marc Francis and Cllr Rachel Blake declared a Non-Registerable Interest in Agenda Item 12.1 (Motion on Tower Hamlets – a Go To Borough) in that the matter under discussion affected a body they had registered as a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest. They left the meeting once the interest had been identified during discussion of that item.

3. MINUTES

The Council **RESOLVED** to:

1. Agree the minutes of the ordinary Council meeting of 24th January 2024, the Budget meeting minutes of 28th February 2024 and the extraordinary meeting minutes of 20th March 2024 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

Steve Halsey, Chief Executive provided an update to the Council meeting, highlighting the following issues:

- Steve Halsey thanked the Elections team, polling clerks and count staff for their work on the London Assembly elections. He said he had visited over 20 polling stations on the day of the election and was pleased to see the elections conducted in such a positive way.
- He also stated the Leisure Service had been insourced and re-branded as “Be Well” as of the 1st May. He said the service would be providing holistic programmes for older people, people with long-term conditions as well as women and girls so as to increase participation and ensure all groups had access to good leisure services.

5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

5.1 Petition to Defend Free Speech and Democracy

Alex Owolade and Shanaz Akhtar Chowdhury presented their petition relating to defending Free Speech and Democracy. Mr Owolade said many people in the community had concerns relating to the government’s Prevent programme. He said the Prevent programme targeted the Muslim community and was an Islamophobic policy which restricted free speech. He said this had become more acute due to the on-going war in Palestine. He said there had been incidents where innocent comments have been misconstrued, resulting in harsh action under the prevent programme.

He asked the Mayor of Tower Hamlets to meet with local community groups so they could share their experience with Prevent and for Tower Hamlets to make a stand against the Prevent policy.

Members asked questions of the petitioner before Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities responded to matters raised in the petition. Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury stated the Council had a duty to report on the government’s Prevent programme. However, he was aware of some misplaced and misguided referrals. He said the referral team were treating each case robustly and sensitively. He said they were following best practice and guidance, but fully understood the frustration within the community. He said tension had heightened during the current war in Palestine.

The Council **RESOLVED**:

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

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

MOTION ON A PROGRESSIVE COUNCIL: TWO YEARS OF TRANSFORMATION AND RECOVERY

Council considered a motion as printed in the tabled agenda on the Council being a progressive council: two years of transformation and recovery that had been moved by Councillor Saied Ahmed and seconded by Councillor Maium Talukdar.

Following debate, the tabled motion moved by Councillor Saied Ahmed was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

The Council **RESOLVED** to:

This council notes:

- That two years have passed since the re-election of Mayor Lutfur Rahman and the *Aspire* group.
- That these two years have seen huge levels of investment – not only financially, but also of time; energy; and dedication – to ensure that the Council could begin to deliver services and governance worthy of the residents of Tower Hamlets.
- That upon returning to Office, the Mayor and his Councillors inherited a Council which was financially unstable – with six years of accounts unsigned; £20million of missed savings targets; millions of pounds lent to neighbouring authorities during the COVID-19 and cost-of-living crises; unpaid VAT receipts of over £1million over six years; £11million of unreconciled adult social care payments with significant risk or duplication; spiralling costs to complete the new Town Hall; and grants awarded through single-applicant processes. There were also governance issues – with five years of unsigned *Annual Governance Statements*; one-year budget-setting processes; struggling statutory services, reflected in failed Ofsted and Youth Justice reports; rising crime and community safety issues; and a string of interim Corporate Directors in statutory positions, including the Section 151.
- That public services significantly reduced with minimal resources expended to develop a thriving and accessible network of delivery. Instead, reserves were increased, all while the services available to

residents were allowed to decline and – in some cases – disappear completely.

- That the introduction of the controversial Fire and Hire Policy by the previous Administration led to a palpable loss of staff morale, likely to be the lowest ever given the 90% support for a strike when Unison held a ballot. The introduction of inferior contracts through the *TOWER* rewards scheme contributed to a negative impact on workforce. This was reflected in a council-wide strike, involving national Trade Union leaders.
- That this was compounded in our view by a disconnect between the Mayor's Office and the then-Corporate Leadership Team, allowing a 'two-council culture' to develop, hindering service delivery and strategic clarity in the process.
- That at the earliest possible opportunity – Full Council July 2022 – this administration called for a 'Council-wide' audit to identify the failings that had been hindering delivery; good governance; and fiscal prudence over the previous seven years.

This council believes:

- That the radical measures taken by the current Administration, to reinvest in key services and clean up bad governance and financial practice across the Council, has led to a recovery and reinvigoration of service delivery and performance across the Authority.
- That, through the holistic transformation of how the Council sets its budgets – underpinned by a three-year MTFS strategy and regular financial health checks – residents can now access a range of services that have been funded sustainably, allowing for their sustainability and delivery into the future.
- That the reintroduction and reinvigoration of such key services as the Education Maintenance Allowance; University Bursaries; Free School Meals for all students up to the age of 16; £10million investment to support residents through the cost of living crisis; a universal freeze for all residents in the first year and as per the *Aspire Manifesto* a continuing freeze for the poorest to protect low and middle earners; additional investment in the Youth Service receiving nearly £11million extra a year; strengthened community safety, through the recruitment of 42 additional Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers, enveloped funds for extra police officers and new CCTV infrastructure; reconnecting and listening to residents through the reopening of 5 residents hubs across the borough; improving residents health and wellbeing through the insourcing of the Council's leisure services, ensuring that no resident is left behind; protecting the environment through the planting of thousands of new trees, the retrofitting of Council buildings with green technology and through the installation of over a thousand Electric Vehicle charging points, with more to come; and a revitalised and resourced Waste Service, has slowly seen the Council and borough

return from years of cuts and neglect to a position of delivery and resident satisfaction.

- That this progress and ambition was identified and commended in the recent *LGA Corporate Peer Review*. The Council has also won awards for its Town Hall; Free School Meals service; as well as being nominated for nine other parliamentary and national awards.
- That the strides taken to redress and resolve the financial and governance issues inherited from the previous administration – facilitated by a new one-council culture where the Mayor and Corporate Management Team work together to solve issues – has ensured that the financial and operational health of the Council has been drastically improved.
- That this is reflected in a transformative and sustainable MTFS programme; a clean and audited set of accounts; up-to-date *Annual Governance Statements*; repaid outstanding VAT receipts; well-run and improved performance in key statutory services; and an ongoing council-wide restructuring to further strengthen and improve good governance and performance across the organisation.
- That the improvements made are looking to make Tower Hamlets one of the best run and ambitious Local Authorities, not only in London, but in the entire country.

This council resolves:

- To continue to support the Best Value Inspectors in their examination of the Council, and to offer to share best practice for other authorities looking to implement similar improvements.
- To continue to work with and implement the findings of the LGA Corporate Peer Review.
- To constantly undergo self-examination and evaluation, identifying ways in which it can improve while continuing to deliver for the people who matter most, the residents.
- To continue to strive for excellence across the council's services, and look beyond the next two years to the future, to ensure that such delivery can be sustained for future generations.

8. OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE

MOTION ON: BEST VALUE INSPECTIONS

Council considered a motion as printed in the tabled papers on the best Value Inspections that had been moved by Councillor Marc Francis and seconded by Councillor Sirajul Islam.

Council also considered the amendment proposed by Councillor Saied Ahmed and seconded by Councillor Kabir Ahmed as set out in the tabled papers.

Additions Underlined

Deletions ~~Struckthrough~~

This Council notes:

- April 2024 marks the 10th anniversary of the Government's decision to instruct PwC to undertake a 'best value inspection' of Tower Hamlets Council during Lutfur Rahman's first term as Executive Mayor;
- Despite opposition from Mayor Lutfur Rahman and Tower Hamlets Council corporately to this audit, PwC concluded that Tower Hamlets Council was failing to comply with its best value duty which the government considered amounted to serious irregularity in the allocation of some grants and the disposal of some council-owned assets, as well as noting the allegations of possible fraudulent payments in the Youth Services Team that were subject to a separate police investigation; The police found no case to answer.
- As a result of these findings, in December 2014, the former Secretary of State issued directions for independent Commissioners to be sent into Tower Hamlets Council to oversee the award of grants, the sale of assets, publicity and subsequently further directions were issued requiring the appointment of a permanent Chief Executive.
- In April 2015, following Mayor Lutfur Rahman's removal from office, the former Secretary of State issued further directions which gave the independent Commissioners the powers 'to ensure that there is effective financial management safeguarding the assets and financial integrity of the Authority' which amounted to the power to intervene in all significant financial transactions by the authority.
- Independent Commissioners finally ended their role in 2018 after Tower Hamlets Council we believe that under former Mayor John Biggs' leadership demonstrated significant progress in all the areas in which concerns had been raised by PwC and the Secretary of State; yet it was discovered in 2022, that there were still many significant and easily identifiable issues in these areas, including six years of unsigned Council accounts and five years of unpublished annual governance statements.
- Mayor Lutfur Rahman and Tower Hamlets First / Aspire Councillors have never publicly apologised to the people of Tower Hamlets for the issues revealed by the PwC audit;
- In December 2023 a local government peer review report identified some positives about Tower Hamlets Council since Lutfur Rahman's re-election as Executive Mayor, and whilst noting that considerable staff

churn at senior managerial level is not uncommon following a change of political and managerial leadership it was important the council now reaches a more settled state. It also highlighted concerns about the lack of women's voices in decision making and referenced a 'Two Council Culture' that impacted on the speed of decision making.

- As the LGA stated "Fuelling the two-council culture is an evident lack of trust from some members and officers (although it should be noted that this is not at front line level). This, if not addressed, could undermine the further delivery of the Mayor's priorities as well as impacting on the effective operation of a number of the council's business-as-usual functions. This mistrust between members and officers, whilst it is not uniform, is problematic and all involved need to communicate in a more open and collaborative fashion with clear and established pathways for decision making."
- In December 2023, Tower Hamlets Council published an 'action plan' in response to the LGA Peer Review Team's concerns without having spoken to opposition councillors about its content, and which will not properly address concerns about governance raised; which we believe wasn't the case
- At a Cabinet meeting in January 2024, the Mayor claimed that the LGA Peer Review Team's criticisms were actually about the governing culture under former Mayor John Biggs, which wasn't the case;
- On 22nd February 2024, the Minister of State for Local Government announced that he was instructing an independent team led by former Chief Executive of Newham Council Kim Bromley-Derry CBE DL to undertake a further 'best value inspection' of Tower Hamlets Council with immediate effect, including of its leadership, governance, organisational culture and use of resources;
- The inspection team has been specifically asked to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the audit and scrutiny functions, the appointment to senior management posts; the expansion of the Mayor's Office and use of advisors; policy and practice in grant-making and *"the use of resources for elections and the maintenance of the independence of the Returning Officer"*.

This Council believes;

- It should be a concern for Mayor Lutfur Rahman and the 24 Aspire Party councillors that the manner in which they lead Tower Hamlets Council means it is again subject to an independent 'best value inspection' under their political leadership; despite significant, demonstrable improvements in the Council's finances, governance, and performance, including the signing off of these outstanding six

years of accounts, and the publication of all five outstanding annual governance statements.

- There is now a serious risk that the Secretary of State will again decide to send Commissioners in to oversee spending, sales of assets, governance and the forthcoming elections, including the General Election and the 2026 local elections;
- Having Commissioners run Tower Hamlets Council again is not in the interest of our residents as it takes decision-making out of the hands of democratically-elected members;
- The person best placed to stop Commissioners being sent in is Mayor Lutfur Rahman, through making a fundamental change in the manner in which he leads Tower Hamlets Council.

This Council resolves:

- To call on Mayor Lutfur Rahman to reduce the number of advisors and consultants in the Mayor's Office and remove any media/communications staff from its line-management;
- To call on the Chief Executive to consult with opposition councillors on the actions needed to give confidence to the public that there will be a significant enhancement of the scrutiny and audit functions, including acting on the LGA Peer Review Team's recommendation that the Audit Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Committee should be chaired by Opposition councillors;
- To call on Mayor Lutfur Rahman and the Chief Executive to continue to fully and immediately comply with any requests for information from the 'best value inspection' team;
- To call on the Monitoring Officer to ensure there is full transparency in political decision-making, including by providing elected members with the legal advice obtained at the request of Mayor Lutfur Rahman in relation to his powers in 2022 and 2023;
- To call on the Chief Executive to continue with ~~commence~~ an open and independent process for making appointments to the Women's Commission which is being established to address the absence of female voices in decision-making by Mayor Lutfur Rahman and his Cabinet.

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

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

The Council **RESOLVED** to:

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lack of women's voices in decision making and referenced a 'Two Council Culture' that impacted on the speed of decision making.

- As the LGA stated "Fuelling the two-council culture is an evident lack of trust from some members and officers (although it should be noted that this is not at front line level). This, if not addressed, could undermine the further delivery of the Mayor's priorities as well as impacting on the effective operation of a number of the council's business-as-usual functions. This mistrust between members and officers, whilst it is not uniform, is problematic and all involved need to communicate in a more open and collaborative fashion with clear and established pathways for decision making."
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- There is now a serious risk that the Secretary of State will again decide to send Commissioners in to oversee spending, sales of assets, governance and the forthcoming elections, including the General Election and the 2026 local elections;
- Having Commissioners run Tower Hamlets Council again is not in the interest of our residents as it takes decision-making out of the hands of democratically-elected members;
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- To call on Mayor Lutfur Rahman and the Chief Executive to continue to fully and immediately comply with any requests for information from the 'best value inspection' team;
- To call on the Monitoring Officer to ensure there is full transparency in political decision-making, including by providing elected members with the legal advice obtained at the request of Mayor Lutfur Rahman in relation to his powers in 2022 and 2023;
- To call on the Chief Executive to continue with an open and independent process for making appointments to the Women's Commission which is being established to address the absence of female voices in decision-making by Mayor Lutfur Rahman and his Cabinet.

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

There were no executive or committee reports for Council to consider at the meeting.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business for Council to consider at the meeting.

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 Kamrul Hussain

Can the Lead member provide an update on the council's outstanding accounts which were left unsigned for 6 consecutive years under the previous administration.

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

All accounts up to and including 2019/20 have been signed off. The 3 remaining outstanding years (2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23) have now all been published and are expected to be signed off by the auditors by September 2024.

Supplementary question from Councillor Kamrul Hussain

Can you please state what has been learnt from the unassigned accounts?

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

The cost of six-years of unassigned accounts has been in the region of £2M and rising. The Council has through learning implemented changes to policies and procedures as well as training. The three outstanding accounts are expected to be signed off by September 2024.

11.2 Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin

Residents have heard rumours that the administration is planning to turn the Stebondale Street football pitches, in to floodlit pitches available for hire until 9pm at night. Please could the administration confirm what their plans are for the Stebondale pitches.

Response of Councillor Iqbal Hossain Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation

The council is currently looking at the feasibility of installing a 9V9 3G Pitch at Stebondale, in partnership with the Football Foundation. This will replace the existing under-utilised area. The proposed facility will include floodlights and will allow the council to deliver a targeted community sport programme for

Women and Girls groups, Young people, etc. We are currently at an early stage of the feasibility, focusing on the logistics of installing such a facility. Once we know that an artificial pitch is feasible, we will start the consultation process with local residents and potential user groups, and then develop an operational plan accordingly which will include hours of use etc. Initial indicative designs are expected soon, and we anticipate beginning consultation exercises from the end of May onwards.

Supplementary question from Councillor Mufedah Bustin

Residents are concerned about the floodlights. Can the lead member say when the consultation will take place?

Response of Councillor Iqbal Hossain Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation

Once the feasibility study had been completed, residents and stakeholders will be consulted.

11.3 Question from Councillor Musthak Ahmed

Can the Lead Member update us on progress with the recommendations following the LGA Corporate Peer Review which took place in September last year?

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

The Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (LGA CPC) for the Council in September 2023. The report, published in December acknowledged the many positive aspects of the organisation's performance and the motivated and focused staff who work for it. The report made 18 core recommendations. These and over 70 suggestions for improvement or review embedded within the text of the LGA CPC report were brought together to comprise the content of the Council's initial response as set out in its LGA CPC action plan. This was also published in December three months earlier than required as it was considered important to demonstrate the Council's commitment to improvement. Doing so did not inhibit the contribution of others to the plan over the following weeks and months as the Action Plan is a live document and additional actions can be identified and added at any time. It did however ensure that the Council's commitment to addressing every issue highlighted by the Peer Review was transparently made and set to a timetable.

Supplementary question from Councillor Musthak Ahmed

Can the Lead Member state how Members were engaged in the process and the review?

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

All political groups and single representatives of Parties represented within the Council were briefed on the findings of the review and the action plan by the Chief Executive and all Parties continue to be free to suggest additional content.

A considerable amount of progress has and continues to be made in delivering against the actions identified. Priority focus fell on a number of critical problem areas of governance that had persisted for a number of years. These covered areas such as the backlog of council accounts awaiting external auditor sign off and the absence of published annual governance statements. These were critical issues that were identified in the Action Plan and have all now been addressed. This report sets out progress to date.

11.4 Question from Councillor Asma Islam

Could the Mayor inform me as to whether he has been in communication with Peabody HA? Peabody tenants across the borough have written to me expressing alarm about dramatic increases to service charges – With many tenants also raising poor quality maintenance and substandard conditions?

Response of Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding

Peabody is an independent housing association with a Chief Executive that is accountable to residents and the Chair of the Peabody Board.

The Mayor and council are passionate about ensuring residents receive a good quality of service and are committed to continue working with social housing providers to ensure that residents receive good quality housing services, and we will continue to work with them to understand residents' concerns and to offer support.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Asma Islam

How does the Mayor communicate with Peabody Housing Association?

Response of Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding

If there are specific issues that Councillor Islam wishes to raise on behalf of residents, then the Mayor and myself would be happy to investigate those further.

11.5 Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed

Can the Lead Member share how much it cost the taxpayer to unsuccessfully take one of our MPs - Apsana Begum to court? Can he explain how this represented Best Value?

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

The costs of prosecuting Apsana Begum MP were:
£18,261.00 for external counsel;
£14,899 for the investigation team;
£55,457.50 for Legal services.

It should be noted that the legal and investigation cost are internal costs, rather than expenditure, and legal services' time is permitted to be charged out at a rate in excess of the lawyer's salaried hourly rate.

With respect to whether this reflect best value, the Council is under a duty to protect the public purse. Social housing fraud is particularly prevalent in London and within the borough. When prosecuting offences, the Council follows the Code for Crown Prosecutors and prosecutes only where the evidential and public interest tests are met. The former test is that, viewed objectively, a court is more likely than not to convict the alleged offender. The public interest looks at matters such as the type of offence, the impact of such offending on the community, the likely sentence on conviction, and similar. The case was kept under review in accordance with the Code. It is impossible to predict the outcome of any prosecution and prosecutions may fail for any number of reasons. It would have been remiss of the Council to not prosecute Ms. Begum in circumstances where the tests in the Code for Crown Prosecutors were met.

11.6 Question from Councillor Amy Lee

Councillor Amy Lee was not present at the meeting to ask her question.

11.7 Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Mr Speaker can the Lead Member tell us what steps have been taken to collect the money owed to the Council, from the Rich Mix Centre. The Rich Mix was loaned a substantial amount of taxpayers money under a previous Labour administration, and it is understood whilst this loan remains unpaid more money was given to the organisation under the last Mayor. It will help to provide precise figures and an explanation as to how this constituted Best Value?

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

From the records available, the Council made a soft loan to "Rich Mix" which was be repaid as part of a settlement. The amount was approximately £1M which was approved by the former Mayor John Biggs. The details of the legal settlement are yet to be confirmed.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Can the lead member state what outstanding amount was written off and what the grounds for the write-off were?

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

Approximately £850,000 were loaned to Rich Mix. Details of what has been paid back, what is outstanding and what has been written off are unknown and would need to be investigated further. The Councillor would be right to call for a public enquiry regarding this loan and settlement.

11.8 Question from Councillor Asma Begum

Councillor Asma Begum was not present at the meeting to ask her question.

11.9 Question from Councillor Harun Miah

Mr Speaker, I want to start by thanking the Police, council and community groups for keeping our borough safe and cohesive despite attempts by a minority to portray Tower Hamlets as a No-Go area - which is utter rubbish.

Can the Lead Member share feedback from the council's Tension Monitoring Group in relation to the Palestine Flags, can he tell us how many complaints have been received and what action was taken?

Response of Councillor Abu Talha Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

The Tension Monitoring Group has existed for several years and has been critical in managing tensions that emerge in the community due to local, national, and international incidents. Since the start of the conflict in the middle east, the Tension Monitoring Group has discussed matters arising from the placement of flags and a number of different views have been expressed in the meetings.

There have been approximately 346 queries/complaints since October 2023. The action taken was determined on an individual basis depending on the context of the placement.

11.10 Question from Councillor Rebakah Sultana

Could the lead member update us on the progress of the Council's Women's commission and inform us how it will work in relation to the operations of the council?

Response of Councillor Suluk Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Inclusion

The Women's Commission was formally launched during International Women's Day Awards Ceremony on 7th March 2024.

The focus of the Commission is to work as a partnership to identify the key issues for women in the borough and to produce a report setting out recommendations for consideration by the Council and partners. This will ensure that women's voices are heard and support them to take up positions of influence and leadership in the community.

The Commission will focus on the following areas of inequalities faced by women in the borough:

- High Unemployment.
- Health Inequalities including maternity care.
- Community/women's Safety
- Lack of females in leadership positions.

11.11 Question from Councillor Ahmodur Khan

Can the Lead Member provide an update with timelines on the insourcing of Tower Hamlets leisure services from GLL?

Response of Councillor Iqbal Hossain Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation

The timelines for insourcing Leisure Centres across to LBTH.

- GLL (Better Leisure) contract finishes – Tuesday 30th April
- LBTH – Be Well contract starts – Wednesday 1st May
- Welcome event at York Hall – Wednesday 1st May
- All Leisure Centres closed for mobilisation – Wednesday 1st May – Tuesday 7th May
- Communications and launch event – Mile End Leisure Centre & Stadium – Tuesday 7th May

Supplementary question Councillor Ahmodur Khan

Can the lead member clarify if staffing levels will be maintained or will there be a small cut?

Response of Councillor Iqbal Hossain Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation

There has been a small shortfall of staff, however mitigation action has been taken and the service will be fully staffed.

11.12 Question from Councillor Shubo Hussain

Could the lead member inform me of what steps are being taken to communicate with residents regarding the changes to leisure services and reassure them that they will still receive the same services in the interim?

Response of Councillor Iqbal Hossain Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation

We have made sure communications have been sent to residents and members regarding the insourcing of Leisure Centres.

- From 10 March, Our East End article circulated highlighting the justifications for insourcing, what the changeover process will involve and upcoming offers
- From 27 March 'coming soon' webpage live on the Be Well website with clear FAQs on the changeover process for memberships and direct debits etc
- From end of March/across April, messaging across social media channels, resident, member and headteachers newsletters and council WhatsApp group, on the new brand, changeover process and directing to FAQs
- From 27 March Be Well inbox/contact form open for queries

Supplementary question from Councillor Shubo Hussain

Has there been any consultation with residents in Bromley South?

Response of Councillor Iqbal Hossain Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation

We didn't consult on a ward-by-ward basis but have listened and invited different groups and will continue to do so whilst we insource the leisure service.

11.13 Question from Councillor Abdul Malik

Can the lead member provide an update on the outcome of refreshed Local Plan consultation and if possible, outline any significant changes which will help bring investment and the delivery of affordable housing?

Response of Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding

The Local Plan has a number of statutory requirements over the 3 years it takes to produce. We are making good progress with the drafting and consultation milestones and are on track to submit to the Secretary of State in February 2025, with the aim of adopting later the same year.

In Nov-Dec 2023 the Local Plan team undertook a 6-week consultation on the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan. This consultation used a combination of in person and online events alongside use of print and social media to engage widely with our residents, statutory consultees and other stakeholders. The feedback received through the consultation has been used to shape the emerging Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan. A Consultation Statement which summarises in fuller, the details of the Regulation 18 consultation will be published alongside the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan.

11.14 Question from James King

What steps has the council taken to address the continuous vandalism of cars down Milligan Street and around Limehouse Causeway and Narrow Street?

Response of Councillor Abu Talha Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

The Police and the Council have received reports of vehicle crime and criminal damage in this location. Our officers are working closely with the Met Police to address this crime through the deployment of our resources, engagement with local residents and businesses to prevent and deter this criminality.

We are:

Sharing information and working in partnership with the Police to identify all the hotspot locations.

Directing our Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers to carry out proactive targeted patrols to provide a visible presence, to prevent and deter any further incidents from occurring.

Submitted a request through our joint operational tasking process with the Police for additional police resources to target this criminality.

Liasing with residents & local businesses to provide advice & guidance on reporting crime to the Police.

Offering advice on crime prevention methods along with obtaining any evidence to support the police with any criminal investigation/s.

Utilising our CCTV - a deployable CCTV camera has been installed a known hotspot to help us capture evidence to support the criminal investigation.

Utilising communications and messaging – posters and signs that will be installed in affected areas to remind residents to ensure their vehicles are locked and valuables are out of sight. The posters are designed to act as a deterrent for perpetrators who wish to commit car crime in that location.

Supplementary question from Councillor James King

Can the lead member tell me when the CCTV cameras were installed?

Response of Councillor Abu Talha Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

The cameras were installed over the last two-weeks. The Police and the Council will be reviewing any footage and will take action where necessary. At present no decision as come of it.

Questions 11.15 to 11.23 were not put due to lack of time. Written responses are attached as an Appendix to these minutes).

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

12.1 Motion on Tower Hamlets – A Go-To Borough

Council considered a motion as printed in the agenda on Tower Hamlets – A Go-to Borough that had been moved by Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury and seconded by Councillor Kabir Ahmed.

Following debate, the motion moved by Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury was put to the vote and was unanimously **agreed**.

The Council **RESOLVED** to:

This Council notes:

- The overwhelmingly positive role that the cooperation and coexistence communities in our borough has played in the identity, spirit and development of Tower Hamlets.
- The integral and invaluable role that migrants, refugees, and asylum-seeking peoples have played in shaping the history and culture of Tower Hamlets.
- That those fleeing tyranny, oppression and war – whether they Jewish communities; Huguenots; the Irish, Caribbean, Bangladeshi, and Southeast Asian communities; or Somali communities and many others – have always been welcomed into this Borough, enriched our community, and thrived.
- That the contribution of these communities to the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of the Borough have changed its identity for the better.
- That in Tower Hamlets, we enjoy very strong community cohesion, with many different groups living side by side. Our Annual Residents Survey found that 87% of residents said that Tower Hamlets is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together.
- That these communities have stood together and fought against racism and hatred in every generation: from the Irish, Jewish and working-class cockneys who stood bravely against the fascist Blackshirts in the 1930s; to the Caribbean community that fought against racism in the 50s and 60s; the Bangladeshi and South East Asian community – including the Mayor and many members from across the chamber –

who faced down the National Front in the 70s and 80s; and the broad coalition of communities that expelled the EDL in the 2010s.

- That from Wapping to Whitechapel; Bow to Bethnal Green; and Canary Wharf to Limehouse, these communities have made all areas of Tower Hamlets a 'go-to' place to be. Through art; cuisine; community projects; history; and the mixing and sharing of cultures, this borough exemplifies the best of London, and is a shining example of how diversity and respect brings out the best of residents and their areas.

This Council believes:

- That recent comments about our borough – underpinned by ignorance; Islamophobia; and division – could not be further from the truth.
- Tower Hamlets has and should always be a borough where the poor, the tired, the oppressed, and the hungry can come and know they will be welcomed and treated with dignity and respect.
- That our borough's diversity and openness represents the best of humanity, and demonstrates that tolerance, respect, and understanding will always produce caring and cooperative places for people to live.
- That regardless of religion, skin colour, sexual orientation, gender, or belief system, Tower Hamlets will always be a safe place for all its residents.

This Council resolves:

- To produce an exhibition showcasing the rich history of diversity, integration and migration to Tower Hamlets, to be showcased in the new Town Hall.
- To invite any individual from Westminster especially those in any doubt to see the positive benefits of this migration and diversity of cultures to come for a tour of Tower Hamlets, to see first-hand the real values that underpin our borough.
- To build on the borough's work with organisations that support and protect the poorest, migrants and refugees.
- To work with communities and external stakeholders to develop and enhance its institutional knowledge in protecting and promoting refugees and asylum-seeking people, strengthen our social inclusion work to build links with marginalised communities, building on the good work of the existing Refugee and Families teams, and to ensure that these new communities can feel as accepted and integrated into the cultural and social fabric of our borough as the scores that preceded them.

- To work with boroughs and authorities across London and the country to protect migrants, refugees, and asylum-seeking people from hostile environments.
- That this administration and Council will continue to promote inclusivity; cooperation; and respect between and amongst all its communities and will always stand up against any division or attacks on our borough.
- To officially state its wish to be designated a 'Borough of Sanctuary' – cementing its commitment to inclusivity, tolerance, and dignity for all people.

The meeting ended at 10.14 p.m.

Speaker of the Council

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Minute Item 11

Appendix A

Item 11: Member Questions and Answers

11.1	Question from Councillor Kamrul Hussain	<p>Can the Lead member provide an update on the council's outstanding accounts which were left unsigned for 6 consecutive years under the previous administration.</p> <p>Response</p> <p>All accounts up to and including 2019/20 have been signed off. The 3 remaining outstanding years (2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23) have now all been published and are expected to be signed off by the auditors by September 2024.</p>
11.2	Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin	<p>Residents have heard rumours that the administration is planning to turn the Stebondale Street football pitches, in to floodlit pitches available for hire until 9pm at night. Please could the administration confirm what their plans are for the Stebondale pitches.</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The council is currently looking at the feasibility of installing a 9V9 3G Pitch at Stebondale, in partnership with the Football Foundation. This will replace the existing under-utilised area. The proposed facility will include floodlights and will allow the council to deliver a targeted community sport programme for Women and Girls groups, Young people, etc. We are currently at an early stage of the feasibility, focusing on the logistics of installing such a facility. Once we know that an artificial pitch is feasible, we will start the consultation process with local residents and potential user groups, and then develop an operational plan accordingly which will include hours of use etc. Initial indicative designs are expected soon, and we anticipate beginning consultation exercises from the end of May onwards.</p>

<p>11.3</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Musthak Ahmed</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member update us on progress with the recommendations following the LGA Corporate Peer Review which took place in September last year?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (LGA CPC) for the Council in September 2023. The report, published in December acknowledged the many positive aspects of the organisation’s performance and the motivated and focused staff who work for it. The report made 18 core recommendations. These and over 70 suggestions for improvement or review embedded within the text of the LGA CPC report were brought together to comprise the content of the Council’s initial response as set out in its LGA CPC action plan. This was also published in December three months earlier than required as it was considered important to demonstrate the Council’s commitment to improvement. Doing so did not inhibit the contribution of others to the plan over the following weeks and months as the Action Plan is a live document and additional actions can be identified and added at any time. It did however ensure that the Council’s commitment to addressing every issue highlighted by the Peer Review was transparently made and set to a timetable. All political groups and single representatives of Parties represented within the Council were briefed on the findings of the review and the action plan by the Chief Executive and all Parties continue to be free to suggest additional content.</p> <p>A considerable amount of progress has and continues to be made in delivering against the actions identified. Priority focus fell on a number of critical problem areas of governance that had persisted for a number of years. These covered areas such as the backlog of council accounts awaiting external auditor sign off and the absence of published annual governance statements. These were critical issues that were identified in the Action Plan and have all now been addressed. This report sets out progress to date.</p>
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		<p>Overall Progress.</p> <p>39% of the total number of actions identified by the Plan have now been completed. All of the listed actions have been completed for 17% of the core recommendations (3 of 18). The Council is on track to have completed 65% of all currently listed actions by the end of May and 85% by August 2024. The LGA CPC team will be returning in August to review progress. If additional actions are added these estimated completion rates may change. All target dates within the Plan may be subject to movement as individual projects develop.</p>
11.4	<p>Question from Councillor Asma Islam</p>	<p>Could the Mayor inform me as to whether he has been in communication with Peabody HA? Peabody tenants across the borough have written to me expressing alarm about dramatic increases to service charges – With many tenants also raising poor quality maintenance and substandard conditions?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Peabody is an independent housing association with a Chief Executive that is accountable to residents and the Chair of the Peabody Board.</p> <p>The Mayor and council are passionate about ensuring residents receive a good quality of service and are committed to continue working with social housing providers to ensure that residents receive good quality housing services, and we will continue to work with them to understand residents' concerns and to offer support.</p>
11.5	<p>Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member share how much it cost the taxpayer to unsuccessfully take one of our MPs - Apsana Begum to court? Can he explain how this represented Best Value?</p> <p>Response</p>

		<p>The costs of prosecuting Apsana Begum MP were: £18,261.00 for external counsel; £14,899 for the investigation team; £55,457.50 for Legal services.</p> <p>It should be noted that the legal and investigation cost are internal costs, rather than expenditure, and legal services' time is permitted to be charged out at a rate in excess of the lawyer's salaried hourly rate.</p> <p>With respect to whether this reflect best value, the Council is under a duty to protect the public purse. Social housing fraud is particularly prevalent in London and within the borough. When prosecuting offences, the Council follows the Code for Crown Prosecutors and prosecutes only where the evidential and public interest tests are met. The former test is that, viewed objectively, a court is more likely than not to convict the alleged offender. The public interest looks at matters such as the type of offence, the impact of such offending on the community, the likely sentence on conviction, and similar. The case was kept under review in accordance with the Code. It is impossible to predict the outcome of any prosecution and prosecutions may fail for any number of reasons. It would have been remiss of the Council to not prosecute Ms. Begum in circumstances where the tests in the Code for Crown Prosecutors were met.</p>
<p>11.6</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Amy Lee</p>	<p>Can the lead member explain why there has been a delay to free community care? And when residents can expect Aspire to deliver on a key manifesto promise?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Mayor's Manifesto made a pledge to return to universal free homecare within the life of this administration. We are on track to do that, with plans underway to introduce free community care from the financial year 2025-2026. This is a realistic and achievable date for implementation given the planning required to implement this change</p>

		including updating the charging policy, changes to the financial assessment process on IT systems, training and communications to residents, staff, and partners.
11.7	Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	<p>Mr Speaker can the Lead Member tell us what steps have been taken to collect the money owed to the Council, from the Rich Mix Centre. The Rich Mix was loaned a substantial amount of taxpayers money under a previous Labour administration, and it is understood whilst this loan remains unpaid more money was given to the organisation under the last Mayor. It will help to provide precise figures and an explanation as to how this constituted Best Value?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>A verbal response was provided and is set out in the main minutes.</p>
11.8	Question from Councillor Asma Begum	<p>Could the lead member inform me as to how the insourcing of THH and Leisure services will affect the council's commitment to reach net-zero by 2030?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The insourcing of the leisure service and THH gives the council opportunity to incorporate the council's net zero carbon ambitions into our housing and leisure asset strategies. There are grants available from the government to part-fund decarbonisation of both social housing and other council buildings, although the level of funding available is not sufficient to meet the total cost. As part leisure insourcing programme, the council's property and major programmes team have commissioned detailed condition surveys of our leisure facilities and developed a 10-year asset investment plan. This includes the replacement of existing heating systems and so there is an opportunity to consider the most appropriate and cost-effective way of incorporating net zero carbon technology. In terms of the council's</p>

		housing stock, surveys have been completed across the housing portfolio and opportunities to reduce emissions have been identified.
11.9	Question from Councillor Harun Miah	<p>Mr Speaker, I want to start by thanking the Police, council and community groups for keeping our borough safe and cohesive despite attempts by a minority to portray Tower Hamlets as a No-Go area - which is utter rubbish.</p> <p>Can the Lead Member share feedback from the council's Tension Monitoring Group in relation to the Palestine Flags, can he tell us how many complaints have been received and what action was taken?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Tension Monitoring Group has existed for several years and has been critical in managing tensions that emerge in the community due to local, national, and international incidents. Since the start of the conflict in the middle east, the Tension Monitoring Group has discussed matters arising from the placement of flags and a number of different views have been expressed in the meetings.</p> <p>There have been approximately 346 queries/complaints since October 2023. The action taken was determined on an individual basis depending on the context of the placement.</p>
11.10	Question from Councillor Rebakah Sultana	<p>Could the lead member update us on the progress of the Council's Women's commission and inform us how it will work in relation to the operations of the council?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Women's Commission was formally launched during International <u>Women's Day Awards Ceremony</u> on 7th March 2024.</p>

The focus of the Commission is to work as a partnership to identify the key issues for women in the borough and to produce a report setting out recommendations for consideration by the Council and partners. This will ensure that women's voices are heard and support them to take up positions of influence and leadership in the community.

The Commission will focus on the following areas of inequalities faced by women in the borough:

- High Unemployment.
- Health Inequalities including maternity care.
- Community/women's Safety
- Lack of females in leadership positions.

How the Commission will work

- **Commissioners** The council will appoint ten commissioners based on their skills and experience and ensuring diverse representation reflective of the community. Three residents representatives will be recruited through an open recruitment process which includes application and interviews. The application for resident commissioners opened on 7th March 2024 and closed on 12th April 2024. We have received really positive response with 32 applications. Shortlisting is underway. The shortlisting and interviews are being led by the Mayor's Advisor on Women and Equalities alongside officers from Mayor's Office. The resident commissioners will support engagement with a diverse range of women reflecting the diversity of women in the borough.
- **Call-for evidence** – invite women to submit written submissions on issues impacting them.
- **Thematic Commission meetings - Local** organisations will be asked to be part of the big conversation and we will consider what can be learnt from best practice.
- **Focus Groups** – Commissioners to meet with a diverse range of women across the borough. This will add richer,

		<p>greater depth to our understanding and help inform and steer the formal evidence sessions and shape recommendations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft recommendations & Report – The Commission will report its findings and recommendations to the Council and partners <p>Commission Findings:</p> <p>The Council consider the recommendations from the Commission and a fully costed action plan will then be developed to deliver against the recommendations. As part of the engagement work on the Commission the draft recommendations will be the subject of further consultation with relevant stakeholders to ensure they are smart and deliverable and help address the recommendations of the Commission. The action plan will be developed by the Council and agreed at Cabinet.</p>
11.11	<p>Question from Councillor Ahmodur Khan</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member provide an update with timelines on the insourcing of Tower Hamlets leisure services from GLL?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Please see below timelines for insourcing Leisure Centres across to LBTH.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GLL (Better Leisure) contract finishes – Tuesday 30th April • LBTH – Be Well contract starts – Wednesday 1st May • Welcome event at York Hall – Wednesday 1st May • All Leisure Centres closed for mobilisation – Wednesday 1st May – Tuesday 7th May • Communications and launch event – Mile End Leisure Centre & Stadium – Tuesday 7th May

<p>11.12</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Shubo Hussain</p>	<p>Could the lead member inform me of what steps are being taken to communicate with residents regarding the changes to leisure services and reassure them that they will still receive the same services in the interim?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Please see below details of communications sent to residents and members regarding the insourcing of Leisure Centres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From 10 March, Our East End article circulated highlighting the justifications for insourcing, what the changeover process will involve and upcoming offers • From 27 March 'coming soon' webpage live on the Be Well website with clear FAQs on the changeover process for memberships and direct debits etc • From end of March/across April, messaging across social media channels, resident, member and headteachers newsletters and council WhatsApp group, on the new brand, changeover process and directing to FAQs • From 27 March Be Well inbox/contact form open for queries • On 28 March, joint GLL/Be Well newsletter sent out to members detailing upcoming changeover process • On 1 April, leisure insourcing article on the LBTH website on the new service, brand and offers – subsequently promoted across social platforms • On 1 April, LBTH insourcing webpage for residents updated • W/c 22 April, coming soon campaign launched across Be Well social media channels signposting to all relevant information for the next few months – including paid promotion and Google Ads • W/c 22 April, messaging across external digital screens (Idea Stores, Town Hall, Youth Centres, Family hubs etc) • W/c 29 April, WhatsApp groups content and assets to be shared, plus continued social promotion
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 29 April, second joint mailer GLL/Be Well newsletter sent out to members detailing upcoming changeover process • Block bookers mailer sent out • From 7 May, official launch campaign rolled out across social media platforms and newsletters.
11.13	<p>Question from Councillor Abdul Malik</p>	<p>Can the lead member provide an update on the outcome of refreshed Local Plan consultation and if possible, outline any significant changes which will help bring investment and the delivery of affordable housing?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Local Plan has a number of statutory requirements over the 3 years it takes to produce. We are making good progress with the drafting and consultation milestones and are on track to submit to the Secretary of State in February 2025, with the aim of adopting later the same year.</p> <p>Consultation:</p> <p>In Nov-Dec 2023 the Local Plan team undertook a 6-week consultation on the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan. This consultation used a combination of in person and online events alongside use of print and social media to engage widely with our residents, statutory consultees and other stakeholders. The feedback received through the consultation has been used to shape the emerging Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan. A Consultation Statement which summarises in fuller, the details of the Regulation 18 consultation will be published alongside the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan.</p> <p>Delivering affordable housing:</p> <p>Through the Reg 18 consultation there were numerous comments on the Local Plan, including for housing and site allocations (which</p>

		<p>include housing as a key use). There were no significant changes required to housing policies in light of comments.</p> <p>To recap, the policy position is to ensure a deliverable land supply for new homes over the plan period and to attain the highest level of affordable housing requirement possible. The emerging Local Plan will include over 30 allocated sites, each with a capacity to deliver above 500 new homes. These allocated sites offer investment security for their development and delivery. The Plan's affordable housing requirement increases to 40% from the 35% as is required by the adopted Local and London Plan. In addition, a requirement of a higher proportion of social rental products (85% of all new affordable homes) and family size homes is also included. The development industry queried these requirements from a viability perspective, however they have been reviewed through a full viability assessment and are considered robust. Residents support these policies.</p> <p>To supplement both the site allocations and housing policies, refinement work has been undertaken on the Plan's Tall Building Zone F. This is to ensure surety and the avoidance of land use tensions when bringing forward residential development within this zone.</p>
<p>11.14</p>	<p>Question from James King</p>	<p>What steps has the council taken to address the continuous vandalism of cars down Milligan Street and around Limehouse Causeway and Narrow Street?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Police and the Council have received reports of vehicle crime and criminal damage in this location. Our officers are working closely with the Met Police to address this crime through the deployment of our resources, engagement with local residents and businesses to prevent and deter this criminality.</p> <p>We are:</p>

		<p>Sharing information and working in partnership with the Police to identify all the hotspot locations.</p> <p>Directing our Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers to carry out proactive targeted patrols to provide a visible presence, to prevent and deter any further incidents from occurring.</p> <p>Submitted a request through our joint operational tasking process with the Police for additional police resources to target this criminality. Liasing with residents & local businesses to provide advice & guidance on reporting crime to the Police.</p> <p>Offering advice on crime prevention methods along with obtaining any evidence to support the police with any criminal investigation/s. Utilising our CCTV - a deployable CCTV camera has been installed a known hotspot to help us capture evidence to support the criminal investigation.</p> <p>Utilising communications and messaging – posters and signs that will be installed in affected areas to remind residents to ensure their vehicles are locked and valuables are out of sight. The posters are designed to act as a deterrent for perpetrators who wish to commit car crime in that location.</p>
<p>11.15</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Ahmodul Kabir</p>	<p>Last Ramadan there were numerous complaints of anti-social behaviour, illegal trading and people fighting in the streets at the back of East London Mosque during and after night prayers. We saw videos of young people wielding machetes and terrified women and children running into the mosque for safety. Can the Lead Member set out what action will be taken to prevent the scenes we saw last year and stop prohibited activities in the vicinity?</p> <p>Response</p>

Prior to the Holy month of Ramadan this year, we worked in partnership with East London Mosque, Police, stakeholders, and other key partners to co-produce an operational action plan to address the ASB. These proactive and preventative measures ensured that everyone was able to enjoy a safe and peaceful Ramadan.

Our Plan included:

The identification of those responsible for the land where the illegal street trading had historically taken place. Proactive engagement and early communications with them.

Offering crime prevention and reporting ASB/crime advice for residents and visitors in advance - leaflets were produced and distributed prior to & during Ramadan advising people on how they can stay safe and report incidents of ASB & Crime to the Council and the Police.

The Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers and the Police provided a highly visible and reassuring presence around the Whitechapel area to prevent any ASB occurring in the first place.

The parking enforcement team were active in ensuring that any vehicles parked illegally and dangerously were addressed and/or towed away. This helped with the flow of traffic.

We have received positive feedback about the work and all actions taken from the local community, local women in the community, the worshippers and from ELM as well.

Plans are already progressing for next year's Holy month of Ramadan. The Council is currently considering and is consulting on the possibility of a new 'Public Space Protection Order' to further address and prevent issues arising next year.

<p>11.16</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Abdal Ullah</p>	<p>Could the Lead Member consider whether a dog park could be installed at Wapping Rose Gardens? Residents have written to me suggesting that a designated space for dogs would benefit the whole community with our canine friends being able to exercise in a space for them and residents reassured that their green spaces are clean and safe for everyone.</p> <p>Response</p> <p>A response was provided to Cllr Ullah in August 2023 to advise that whilst Wapping Gardens and Rose Gardens are popular areas for dog walking, there are processes that would need to be followed for us to consider creating a dog exercise area. This would include conducting a consultation and identifying capital funding.</p> <p>We have advised that should a dog exercise area be implemented then presently there would be no legal requirement for dog users to use the facility.</p> <p>Currently the Council is undertaking a review of dog control measures. Recommendations from this review will be subject to wider Council approval and will inform any future enforcement measures that may be implemented in parks and open spaces. Therefore, it is recommended that this review is concluded to inform any additional amenities / resources invested into parks and open spaces.</p>
<p>11.17</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Bellal Uddin</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member provide an update on the regeneration of the Clichy Estate (known as HAP) which will see around 400 homes being built? It is understood the scheme has progressed significantly under the current Mayor and it will help to share where we are to date and work going forward.</p> <p>Response</p>

		<p>The HAP Regeneration Scheme near the Clichy Estate is the council's largest housing development. It will provide 407 much-needed new homes, a community centre and more. Significant progress has been made over the last year.</p> <p>An amended design has been prepared for the scheme and a planning application submitted in March incorporating the latest building safety standards announced by the Government in 2023, requiring all flats have a secondary means of escape and other measures to improve fire safety. The proposed community centre is also relocated, to become a stand-alone facility, making it better suited to the community's needs.</p> <p>A procurement exercise is currently underway to select a developer partner to take the scheme forward into the construction phase and an appointment is expected this summer. This will then see an initial announcement of a developer being appointed that will enable demolition take place in 2024.</p>
11.18	<p>Question from Councillor Rachel Blake</p>	<p>Can the lead member inform me what is the average waiting time for housing OT assessments in each of past two years please?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The most recent figures available confirm that the current average waiting time for a Housing Occupational Health assessment is 4.5 months with the longest being 8 months and the shortest being less than a week.</p> <p>Waiting times can be influenced by a number of factors including residents' availability to inspect and information requests from health professionals.</p>

		<p>Occupational Therapists also undertake additional duties related to council new build; input on planning applications, site visits and accompanied viewings for residents on Project 120.</p> <p>The service has recently recruited 2 x apprentices to provide admin support to free up Occupational Therapist time to concentrate on assessments.</p> <p>A planned service restructure/review will examine increased capacity in this area.</p>
11.19	<p>Question from Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled</p>	<p>I understand the independent investigation, initiated by 31 members of staff, into housing management across housing options and homelessness has concluded, can the Lead Member share the findings and recommendations?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Julie Lorraine (CD Resources) is currently actively in discussions with the trade unions and staff to ensure that recommendations lead to actions which meet the needs of the staff and sustainably support their wellbeing.</p>
11.20	<p>Question from Councillor Sabina Akhtar</p>	<p>Could the lead member inform me of progress of development of the Clichy Estate?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The HAP Regeneration Scheme near the Clichy Estate is the council's largest housing development. It will provide 407 much-needed new homes, a community centre and more. Significant progress has been made over the last year.</p> <p>An amended design has been prepared for the scheme and a planning application submitted in March incorporating the latest</p>

		<p>building safety standards announced by the Government in 2023, requiring all flats have a secondary means of escape and other measures to improve fire safety. The proposed community centre is also relocated, to become a stand alone facility, making it better suited to the community's needs.</p> <p>A procurement exercise is currently underway to select a developer partner to take the scheme forward into the construction phase and an appointment is expected this summer. This will then see an initial announcement of a developer being appointed that will enable demolition take place in 2024.</p>
11.21	<p>Question from Councillor Sirajul Islam</p>	<p>Could the lead member inform me of whether the council is communicating with relevant partners and reassuring THCH residents now that the proposed merger with Poplar Harca has reportedly ended?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The lead member has met with Poplar HARCA and is due to meet with lead representatives of THCH alongside the Mayor in the forthcoming weeks.</p> <p>Post meeting with THCH the council will endeavour to publish a more robust and comprehensive statement for residents once further information and clarity has been sought from all parties involved. The council will discuss the ramifications for the residents as well as the next steps for both landlords.</p> <p>For the interim the council has updated the merger statement on the webpage as of 18th April for borough residents.</p> <p>In addition, both Landlords have updated their websites and social media channels informing residents of the dissolution of merger and provided FAQ links to reassure residents concerned.</p>

11.22	<p>Question from Councillor Marc Francis</p>	<p>Will the Mayor and Lead Member update Full Council on the action that has been taken in the past two years to improve the safety of pedestrians and cyclists at the mini roundabout at the junction of Tredegar Road and Fairfield Road?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>We are committed to improving the safety of pedestrians and cyclists throughout the borough.</p> <p>During the Liveable Street Bow programme, a scheme for the Tredegar Road / Fairfield Road was developed. Since the project was cancelled, no further plans have been made to implement changes at the junction.</p> <p>This location is not currently on any work programmes. However, given the volume of traffic and potential for crossing improvements, this is a location we can revisit to consider inclusion as part of future works programmes, subject to agreement and securing of funding.</p>
11.23	<p>Question from Councillor Peter Golds</p>	<p>Would the Mayor confirm as to whether there were discussions between the administration, either members or officers or both, and the Regulator with respect to the proposed merger between THCH and Poplar Harca?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Although there was no direct contact made with RSH, when the proposed merger was made public, the Mayor wrote a formal letter asking for the regulator to dissuade THCH joining a larger housing organisation solely determined by a fiscal rationale.</p> <p>The Mayor reiterated resident's feelings were a key aspect in any merger where proposed as the only viable outcome. The Mayor noted</p>

		<p>numerous residents indicated to him they were fearful of their voices being diluted or becoming absent if THCH were amalgamated into a much larger organisation.</p>
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Additionally, the Mayor stated any incoming landlord must ensure promises made are kept. Thus, establishing trust and confidence in residents who at present feel they have been provided with an enduring substandard housing service.

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