

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL****HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2016****THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG****Members Present:**

Mayor John Biggs	Councillor Clare Harrison
Councillor Khaless Uddin Ahmed	Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Rajib Ahmed	Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Ohid Ahmed	Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	Councillor Aminur Khan
Councillor Mahbub Alam	Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Shah Alam	Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Amina Ali	Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Shahed Ali	Councillor Ayas Miah
Councillor Craig Aston	Councillor Harun Miah
Councillor Asma Begum	Councillor Md. Maium Miah
Councillor Rachel Blake	Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah
Councillor Chris Chapman	Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Dave Chesterton	Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury	Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Andrew Cregan	Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor Julia Dockerill	Councillor Gulam Robbani
Councillor David Edgar	Councillor Candida Ronald
Councillor Marc Francis	Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs	Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Peter Golds	Councillor Andrew Wood
Councillor Shafiqul Haque	

The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Khaless Uddin Ahmed in the Chair

During the meeting, the Council agreed to vary the order of business. To aid clarity, the Minutes are presented in the order that the items originally appeared on the agenda. The order the business was taken in at the meeting was as follows:

- Item 1 - Apologies for absence.
- Item 2 – Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.
- Item 3 – Minutes.
- Item 4 – Announcements.
- Items 5 – Petitions.
- Item 5.4 - Petition debate and urgent motion regarding the Community Language Service

- Item 6 – Public Questions.
- Item 7 – Mayor’s Report.
- Item 8 – Members Questions
- Item 9. 1 - Report from Cabinet: Substance Misuse Strategy 2016-19
- Item 9. 2 - Annual Report to the Council by the Independent Person
- Item 11.1 - Treasury Management Quarterly Update Report for Quarter Ended June 2016
- Item 11.2 - The Roles of the Mayor and the Chief Executive and the delegation of powers
- Item 12.1 – Motion regarding the Housing and Planning Act

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor John Pierce
- Councillor Abdul Asad
- Councillor Suluk Ahmed

Apologies for lateness were received on behalf of Councillors Joshua Peck and Marc Francis.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillor Helal Uddin declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5.2, Petition relating to Poplar HARCA parking. This was on the basis that the Councillor’s employer had a working relationship with Poplar HARCA. The Councillor left the meeting for the consideration of this petition.

Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5.4, Petition relating to cuts to community language services and Motion 12.2 on the same subject (not debated). This was on the basis that his wife was an employee of the community language service. The Councillor left the meeting for the consideration of the petition.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 July 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and the Speaker be authorised to sign them accordingly.

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

The Speaker of the Council was delighted to announce that Councillor Oliur Rahman’s wife gave birth to their second child on Wednesday last week. On behalf of the whole Council, he passed on their many congratulations and best wishes to the whole family.

Mayor John Biggs referred to correspondence about an alleged child abduction in the Borough. He emphasised that it was not clear at this stage whether this incident had actually occurred as the Police had received contradictory reports. However, in any event, it was essential that the Council and schools safeguard children and managed any such incidents effectively.

5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

5.1 Petition relating Drug Dealing

Petition not presented due to the absence of the petitioner.

RESOLVED:

1. That the petition be referred to the Chief Executive and Acting Corporate Director, Communities, Localities and Culture, for a written response within 28 days.

5.2 Petition relating to Poplar HARCA parking

Doros Ullah addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Mayor John Biggs then responded to the matters raised in the petition. Whilst acknowledging that responsibility for setting the parking charges fell outside the remit of the Council, the Mayor reported that he and ward colleagues had expressed concerns to the Chief Executive and the Chair of Poplar HARCA about the increase in the parking charges. He also reported that Poplar HARCA had indicated a willingness to review their position and the Administration would be making further representations to them again at that stage.

RESOLVED:

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

5.3 Petition relating to Old Ford Housing Association

John Forster addressed the meeting and responded to questions from Members. Mayor John Biggs then responded to the matters raised in the petition. He stated that he had met and exchanged correspondence with the Circle Housing Group and Affinity Sutton to discuss their plans to close the Old Ford Housing Association and centralise all services under its own management. He thanked all those involved in this work to date, especially Councillor Marc Francis for his efforts in dealing with the concerns and also for pushing for the outstanding repairs works to be carried out. The Administration would continue to escalate these particular concerns.

The Mayor considered that the proposed transfer conflicted with the Housing Association's duty to provide locally managed and accountable services. Accordingly, his Administration would be making representations to that end

and would be triggering the dispute resolution process of the Stock Transfer Agreement that covered some aspects of the concerns.

The Mayor also stated that he was willing to meet and work with the petitioners to secure a better outcome for the management of their housing and to ensure that the new landlord consulted the residents on their plans.

RESOLVED:

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

5.4 Petition Debate – Cuts to community language services

Jahed Chouddhury addressed the meeting on behalf of the petitioners. The Council then debated the matters raised by the petition and Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Culture responded to the issues raised.

Procedural Motion

Councillor Asma Begum **moved** and Councillor Racheal Saunders **seconded**, a procedural motion “that under Procedure Rule 14.1.5, Rule 13.1 be suspended to enable an urgent motion regarding the Community Language Services to be considered”.

The procedural motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**

The Speaker adjourned the meeting at 7.50pm. The meeting reconvened at 8:00pm. The Speaker then adjourned the meeting again at 8:15pm and the meeting was reconvened at 8:30pm.

Councillor Asma Begum **moved**, and Councillor Rachael Saunders **seconded**, the urgent motion [text of motion as set out in the resolution below].

Following debate, the urgent motion as tabled was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

RESOLVED:

This council notes:

1. The passion with which community languages have been supported by committed groups in our communities. The CLS is provided through 50 projects and provides tuition for Bengali, Arabic, Somali, Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Lithuanian, Vietnamese and Urdu.
2. That these classes are provided free of charge to local children in venues across the borough including primary and secondary schools, Idea Stores, local community centres, churches and mosques.

3. That the current budget for Community Language Services is £400,000 a year to fund admin costs and tutor hours. There is however a current overspend of £80,000.
4. That some projects also receive Mainstream Grant funding.
5. That the previous administration left a management system in chaos. A recent audit report raised serious concerns about the way the CLS was managed with regular overspending, poor reporting on what it was achieving and serious safeguarding concerns. We cannot ignore those findings.
6. That the Audit report gave the CLS the lowest rating of Nil as a result of its failing management. The investigation found:
 - Value for taxpayer money was not monitored
 - In some cases no evidence was recorded of students attending and there were no reports on performance.
 - There were no child protection policies in place at some providers
 - Payments were signed off without proper procedures and massive budget overspends.
 - DBS checks were expired and some personal information was unlawfully held.
7. That no change is therefore not an option.
8. That the Mayor understands that the CLS is important to many people in our community and wants to protect and develop it, in partnership with community organisations who support the service, and place it on a more sustainable footing.

This Council also notes that:

9. The Government have removed community languages from the list of accepted GCSEs. The Government have also proposed cutting funding for non-core subjects from next year – this will cut another £3.1m from Tower Hamlets' education budget. For this reason the current arrangement for the early GCSEs must end. The Mayor will look urgently at whether alternative provision can be secured. This is however likely to be difficult.
10. That the First Language Assessment service has not functioned for the past two years – it was stopped under the last administration - as many schools now have their own assessors and there was no demand.
11. That concerns have been expressed about the CLS being moved out of Children's services and into the Idea Stores community learning programme despite this change taking place under the previous administration and being introduced by Cllr Oliur Rahman.

This council believes:

12. That the failures of management identified in the Audit report, which happened under the previous administration, put children, tutors, taxpayer money and the whole CLS service at risk. This was a failure of a service provided to the community.

This Council resolves:

13. To welcome the Mayor's statement recognising the importance of community languages to our community.
14. To note the Mayors intention that the service be supported but recognising that to support the service it must change, in partnership with those who support it.
15. To work with all stakeholders, particularly parents and community groups to ensure that the Community Language Service is fit for purpose.
16. To work with community organisations to develop a service fit for the future and driven by the community.

6. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The following questions and in each case (except where indicated) supplementary questions were put and were responded to by the Mayor or relevant Executive Member:-

6.2 Question from Asik Rahman

I was very impressed with the Mela this year. How many people attended the event – and what other feedback has the Mayor had?

Response by Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Culture

The Mela was indeed a very impressive event. I am proud that Mayor Biggs and I were able to return it, not only back to Banglatown, but also back to being a cultural and family friendly event rather than the overly-expensive and commercialised version run under the previous administration. We estimate that around 40,000 people attended this year's Mela. Those that came would have enjoyed a colourful parade down Brick Lane, amazing main stage acts by local and international artists. There was a catwalk and a family zone and a sport area.

(No supplementary question was put)

6.3 Question from Kevin Brady

When she became Prime Minister, Theresa May said she would tackle "burning injustice" and inequality. Has the Mayor, as leader of one of the most

deprived and unequal boroughs in the country, had any word from the Government to suggest they will stop the cuts to our council budgets?

Response by Mayor John Biggs

I think the indications so far are not good. I think every Prime Minister starts with a little bounce and a honeymoon and reaches out to everyone, but all the indications point towards Theresa May not being a great friend of local government. She doesn't appear to be a fan of the devolution agenda, is making noises about resisting mayors in other parts of the country (people may have mixed views about that) and I don't think she recognises that local government has been hit harder by spending cuts than other parts of the country and many, many very needy people depend on our services and that means that councils are having to make very hard decisions about how they balance their budgets with those tough decisions. Just to quote, or misquote, Ms May back at her, for her Brexit may mean Brexit, but it seems to me that, for her, fairness doesn't mean fairness in local government spending.

Supplementary question from Kevin Brady

It is clear that the government's austerity policies resulted in significant pressures on the Council's budget and you have had some difficult decisions about rate rises and cuts in services, but austerity has been about since 2010, whereas your administration is relatively new, could some of the impacts of the cuts have been mitigated if the previous administration had taken more decisive action?

Mayor John Biggs' response to the supplementary question:

In my view that's a very fair question and I'm disappointed that the Independent Group isn't here to hear it as they are an echo of the former Mayor. I think the answer is that, if you look up and down the country, virtually every other council has had to look carefully at its services, possibly restructure them, look at the needs of communities, make some tough decisions but do so in a balanced and reasoned way. In the case of Tower Hamlets it was a pretty shoddy process in my view, albeit with the advice of our professional officers, and it was in some cases too populist, opportunistic and didn't balance our services as well as it could have done which means that we have hard decisions to make now which are going to be tougher as a result of that. So I agree with your supplementary question.

6.4 Question from Adam Allnut

How many families in Tower Hamlets have been placed in temporary accommodation for over six weeks in each of the last five years?

Response by Councillor Sirajul Islam, Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing Management & Performance)

It is unfortunate the housing crisis has had a detrimental effect on many families in our borough. Perhaps no more than those that have had to live in

bed and breakfast accommodation for extended periods of time. If I gave you the six-week overstay for the last five years I'd be here for a very long time and the speaker may not indulge me, but all the information is on the Council website as we have to report to government, but just as an example, last year at the point when Mayor Biggs was elected there were 232 families in this unfortunate position, today I am pleased to say there are none. So for the first time ever we are statutorily complaint. This is a tremendous achievement and one I am very proud of, however we understand that there is much more to do, most importantly we must ensure that we are building genuinely affordable housing that families need and doing all we can to increase standards in the private rented sector.

Supplementary question from Adam Allnut

As a young professional who has chosen to live in Tower Hamlets, obviously housing is a big cost to me. I am wondering what the Council has done to increase the provision of genuinely affordable private and housing association rental spaces, for people like myself.

Councillor Sirajul Islam's response to the supplementary question:

You may know that Mayor Biggs after being elected set up an affordability commission which was chaired by my colleague, Councillor Blake – and again, that report is available – which told us a mixed tenure of housing provision is what we need to provide in this borough. We are also consulting on a new Housing Strategy, again, you may know. On the 1st October we are holding a housing conference exactly to debate those issues so that we have a housing strategy that provides for the future for people like yourselves, for future generations. I really strongly urge you to come along to the housing conference to have that debate and also the impact the Housing and Planning Act will have on some of the plans we want to put forward. Mayor Biggs has pledged to build 1,000 Council homes in his manifesto which will be launching very soon, but that conference on the 1st of October is an opportunity for residents to contribute to the plans.

6.6 Question from Pete Dickenson

In the light of the Labour Party's new policy, under its leader Jeremy Corbyn, to prioritise the fight against austerity, will the Mayor and Council reconsider their policy of making massive cuts that hit the most vulnerable members of our community and reverse them? Will you also reverse the recent big rise in allowances for the Mayor, Cabinet members and the Leader of the Tory group, totalling £39,848, and use the money saved to reinstate the incontinence laundry service, which costs only £40,000 p.a.? The cuts already made have been extremely damaging, for example the closure of 18 out of 26 youth centres, Queen Mary Nursery (after promising to keep it open), NAFAS support and the £200K cut to CAMHS.

Response by Councillor David Edgar Cabinet Member for Resources

I think Jeremy is right that cuts are a choice, but they are a choice by national government. National government has options about the way they manage economies and the Conservative government has made decisions that means that we, over the next few years, will have to cut £58 million from our budget. The Labour Party is a party that is campaigning against many aspects of government policy. We on this side of the house campaigned against it as well, but we recognise that as a council we have a legal obligation to balance our budget, it is not one we can escape from. If we don't then we have commissioners. As we know, commissioners can come in and control, or the Director of Resources would have power to shape our budget.

We as a Labour Council have to make decisions and when we made those decisions last year we did a whole number of things that protected services that residents said they valued. We put money into things like tackling anti-social behaviour. We put decent wages into the hands of carers. We did a number of things I think really good aspects of that budget, but this year we are going to start on the process of saving £58 million over the next few years. We are going to put those proposals out to the wider world. People will be able to comment. They will be able to tell us what they think of those proposals and when it gets to the detail the service users will speak and we will listen very carefully to what is said.

On one particular point you are just completely wrong: the whole debate earlier on was one that was clear that we are not cutting the Community Language Service. So your starting point that we are cutting that is completely wrong. We are doing what we need to do, in a context that is not of our choosing, which we have a political opposition to, but we are trying to do it in a way that means we look at the support service that we have, we run them as efficiently as we can, we look at the frontline services that we have and we do all we can to protect them, to transform them and to make them work as well as they possibly can.

Supplementary question from Pete Dickenson

There is a very simple way that this Council can demonstrate that it is serious about fighting the cuts. You've cut £40,000 from the incontinence laundry service, a relatively small amount of money. At the same time you have increased the allowances for the Cabinet, the Mayor and the Leader of the Tory Group, by almost exactly the same amount of money. Without breaking any of the government's regulations in terms of spending you could easily reinstate the incontinence laundry service which, incidentally, is just pushing that cost on to the NHS which is absolutely running out of cash very rapidly. That's a very simple, perfectly legal thing that this Council could do and it would demonstrate that you are serious; that you don't just accept passively whatever is thrown at you by the Conservative government. So will you do that? A very simple thing that you could do without breaking any rules whatsoever.

Councillor David Edgar's response to the supplementary question:

Our response is not a passive response. As a party we campaign against the government, we challenge the government, we challenge it's economic philosophy, but as a Council we need to make a series of decisions that we have a legal obligation to. That is recognised by Jeremy Corbyn. To quote him in your question, as suggesting we should be doing something else is quite wrong. On the incontinence laundry service, that was a difficult decision last year. My understanding is that careful work is being done with all the people that received that service so if they need that service, arrangements will be made to ensure that they can.

On the point about the allowances that you raised, clearly allowances are a tricky issue for politicians, councillors, and Members of Parliament. There was an independent review in which we looked at and we only accepted one element of it, which was the amount of money to be paid for backbench councillors. In nine other categories we paid below, often way below, the amount that that independent review recommended and on the other five we were within the band. So I think we acted responsibly in response to that particular independent review and I think you have to look at the savings made last year in the round. Savings that incidentally were £8 million less than that had been planned by the Independent Group and ones where we took the decision to run down reserves by £10 million more than the Independent Group had been proposing earlier, in January 2015.

So I think we have done all we can to protect services in a way that people need, to recognise the vulnerabilities that many residents face and to be as responsible as we can in making very difficult decisions that result from a Tory government's choice.

6.8 Question from Kyrsten Perry

As a local resident, I saw how the previous Mayor's charges for bulk waste collection encouraged more people to fly-tip. How many people have benefited from the introduction of free bulk waste collection since it was introduced last year?

Response by Councillor Ayas Miah Cabinet Member for Environment

You are not alone in remembering the terrible damage that was caused by the previous Mayor's short-sighted decision to introduce charges for bulky waste. I am pleased to say that since Mayor John Biggs scrapped the charges last summer more than 13,500 free bulky waste collections have been made. This means more than one in ten households have used this service in just one year. There is always more we can do to improve the cleanliness of the streets, but I am proud that this one change has made such a big difference.

Supplementary question from Kyrsten Perry

What's the Council doing to help encourage local residents to recycle properly, because I live in Tower Hamlet and I find that not everybody knows

that you need to keep pink bags in the pink container. I even put, personally, signs up in my blocks saying 'let's help the Council because we are just wasting their time and money'. So I am thinking, what is the Council doing to help that?

Councillor Ayas Miah's response to the supplementary question:

Recycling is a big challenge for any council in an inner-London borough, especially Tower Hamlets, as we have such a high number of high rise buildings and narrow streets in Tower Hamlets, so we are trying our best. Last November, 2015, we sent every household a letter on how to use the recycling and there is a free recycling bag available at the Idea Stores. So we started campaigning and educating people to use the recycling bags, which is very beneficial for the Council, as it helps us reduce the cost and I think that we are dealing with housing associations as well on how they will participate to improve our recycling. So I would like to tell you, finally, we are doing our best and in future we will do more and, finally, we have a contract with Veolia and the contract will end very soon, so the next contract will be more concerned with how to improve our recycling.

Questions 6.1,6.5 and 6.7 were not put due to the absence of the questioners. Written responses would be provided to the questions. (Note: The written response is included in Appendix 'A' to these minutes.)

7. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor made his report to the Council, referring to his written report circulated at the meeting, summarising key events, engagements and meetings since the last Council meeting.

When the Mayor had completed his report and at the invitation of the Speaker the Leader of the Conservative Group then responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

8. 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:-

8.1 Question from Councillor Andrew Cregan:

The recent independent report into electoral fraud highlights a number of positive changes we have made to tighten up our electoral systems. Does the Mayor agree that while we have taken important steps to guard against electoral fraud, it makes a mockery of our democracy that we still have councillors whose election was benefitted by 'corrupt and illegal practices'

Response by Mayor John Biggs:

Electoral fraud is a crime which affects everyone and I welcome any action

which helps to crack down on those who set out to steal an election. There were some useful suggestions in the report – some were less useful.

In Tower Hamlets we have made significant changes to tighten up our voting systems since 2014. I'm glad to see this report recognising that good practice and recommending many of those changes be adopted more widely.

The report makes clear that the previous Mayor and his colleagues' abuse of the electoral system was a criminal act.

What concerns me most is that not only was nobody prosecuted, but many of the candidates who benefitted from Lutfur Rahman's corrupt practices remain councillors in this chamber and remain unrepentant. In my opinion that is a disgrace.

The law should clearly be changed so that anyone benefitting from a corrupt election, particularly if they stand for a party which is then abolished because of that corruption, is removed from office or at least forced to re-run the election.

Supplementary question from Councillor Andrew Cregan:

Important work has been done but I would further commend your personal effort in cleaning up politics in this borough after the foul slurs and baseless attacks you were subjected to in 2014 by Tower Hamlets First. I would also commend the personal efforts of a member of the gallery who did far more than most at a great personal risk and did the borough an immeasurable service in delivering a post Lutfur Rahman era. So does the Mayor agree with me that this important task will only be fully complete when the rabble opposite, the shower of petulance are removed from this chamber permanently?

Mayor John Biggs' response to the supplementary question:

The answer to your question is yes. We do need to clean up the borough. We need to have people in this chamber who respect the rules of democracy, who respect each other in debate, who stand up without favour and any nervousness to champion the causes they passionately believe in. I think it is also important to say and you did mention that there might be someone in the public gallery, that we should pay our respect to the four petitioners who took the election petition and we should be alarmed by the headlines. If you read my written report, you will see that I am going to write to the Prime Minister about this, because I think there is an irregularity where people win a contest and then face potential bankruptcy. I think there is a serious problem with how the law works and we should as a borough pay great respect to those who put themselves on the line to challenge the bad malpractice in this borough.

8.3 Question from Councillor Sabina Akhtar:

Could the Cabinet Member for Environment list what awards our parks in Tower Hamlets have achieved?

Response by Councillor Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Culture:

Meath Gardens recently joined Victoria Park, Mile End Park and seven other parks in the borough by earning its first Green Flag Award.

This year Tower Hamlets Council retained all of its Green Flags, and now with Meath Gardens, it brings the number of Green Flag parks in the borough to 10. This is the highest number the borough has ever had.

We have yet to hear the results from London in Bloom but last year the Borough did exceptionally well and as a result was nominated for Britain in Bloom which we will hear the results of later this year.

(No supplementary question was put.)

8.4 Question from Councillor Julia Dockerill:

Following the decision by the Mayor in Cabinet to make permanent the borough wide 20mph speed limit, will he explain exactly how this is to be enforced, as currently pedestrians, cyclists and motorists face safety problems from those who choose to ignore the limit due to the lack of enforcement?

Response by Councillor Mayor John Biggs:

I wanted to answer this question personally as I made a personal decision to confirm this policy for the time being, unless another administration changes this, as the permanent rule in this borough. I think 20 is plenty is a good slogan. I think it is also quite powerful and useful that when people travel on a road with a yellow line in towns they know that the speed limit is 20 mph. I think consistency is something that is important. So I am committed to making the streets safer and making the limit permanent is one important part of that and while it is early days the signs are encouraging with the number of fatal and serious collisions over the first nine months of the trial period down by 20 and 22 per cent respectively. We will monitor that and will invest in the roads where the inclination of drivers is to break that speed limit. I think a lot of people feel anxious and quite often we are hypocrites in our lives and we like getting places quickly. We actually want the streets we live on to be quiet and peaceful where people respectfully defer to the interests of vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and those who are younger or physically less able than ourselves.

Supplementary question from Councillor Julia Dockerill:

Would the Mayor encourage the Police to undertake a series of night-time enforcement operations in areas where boy racing is a particular problem such as Wapping and Glengall Grove and other place on the Isle of Dogs?

Mayor John Biggs' response to the supplementary question:

Absolutely and I know it's a problem in Wapping where you and I live and I know that there is a particular problem in Westferry. The Police do need to take a greater interest. Obviously we do need more Police on our streets for this to happen. I do notice when Islington first introduced the 20 mph limit the Police more or less said that there were not going to enforce it. But now I find, not by personal experience as a driver but through people that I might know, that they have been stopped by the Police when travelling above the limit in a 20mph zone. The Police I think are taking the limit seriously as they recognise that by enforcing good behaviour in the Borough and making clear that we expect people to behave properly, we are helping to create a more civilized and safe place for everyone. It's a sort of a version of broken windows perhaps broken tyres.

8.5 Question from Councillor Rajib Ahmed:

Can the Cabinet Member for Children's Services update the Council on the recent school exam results?

Response by Councillor Rachael Saunders, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services:

There are two issues where we are giving you a really clear answer. One is that the way in which the results are measured has changed this year. So it's not possible to compare like for like. The other is that two schools haven't yet chosen to give us their results – Mulberry and what was until recently the Bethnal Green Academy. My understanding is that their results are good so they should not pull the averages down.

On the new measure, secondary exam results, GCSEs were sound and consistent with last year's results in the context of a national decline in results. So we are continuing to do really well where others are doing less well. Post sixteen performance is the same situation. Our average grade at A Level is now C so that's a steady improvement over the last four years. But I think you would all agree that we would like to be doing much better than that and this is an area where there is more to do.

Vocational subjects also demonstrated an improvement and each entry now averages a good distinction grade. So really good results but more to do post sixteen.

We should congratulate all parents, teachers and young people for those achievements. On Key Stage 1 and 2, there were also excellent results. Well above the national average and importantly people with special education needs did better at Stage 1 than the national average which is really important to us as well.

(No supplementary question was put.)

8.7 Question from Councillor M. Abdul Mukit MBE:

Members may be aware that the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has launched a review of Boris Johnson's cuts to London's Fire Service. Does the Mayor welcome this review?

Response by Mayor John Biggs:

I should note that within our chamber there is a Member of the Fire Authority, Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs who has been appointed to represent all of the London Council's on behalf of the Labour Party. So she will be flying the flag for Tower Hamlets as part of that. I welcome the review. Since 2009, London's Fire Service has seen its funding cut by more than £150m, with 10 fire stations closed, 27 fire engines axed and over 500 firefighters put out of jobs.

Before leaving office, Boris Johnson set the Brigade's current budget, cutting a further £22m over the next three years. So it's important that the new Mayor reviews that. As a result of Boris Johnson's cuts, we lost Fire Engines in Tower Hamlets at Whitechapel and we lost an entire station at Bow. The review of fire station cuts will be led by Anthony Meyer, the former Chief Executive of the Greater London Authority.

Cutting the number of fire fighters only increases the response times of the local fire services. In the case of Bow, we saw a dramatic increase in response times which means that when a fire does break out you should be a little concerned that the fire service will not get there in a quick time and a house fire quite often spreads quickly. We need to be sensitive to that. So I welcome the review and I want us to submit evidence to it so we can help strengthen the case for good fire service for our citizens in Tower Hamlets.

Supplementary question from Councillor M. Abdul Mukit MBE:

Did you attend the re-opening of the Shadwell fire station?

Mayor John Biggs' response to the supplementary question:

Yes I did. I met Prince Charles who I had not met before and it was a less surreal experience than I expected it to be and I mean that very respectfully. It was also attended by the Deputy Mayor of London, Joanne McCartney and Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs. So we opened the new state of the art facility which I feel shows some confidence in our fire service in the Borough. It is an excellent facility which will also be focusing on community safety initiatives. It's just down the road from Bluegate Fields which was burnt down by an arson attack about 20 years ago which we thought was local youngsters. So community engagement in fire safety, making sure that people are safe in their homes, making sure vulnerable people are protected as well, is all part of the work of the fire service and a new fire station in Shadwell is a very important addition that will help that to happen.

8.8 Question from Chris Chapman:

Would the Mayor comment on Lincoln Plaza, on the Isle of Dogs, being crowned winner of the 2016 Carbuncle Cup for worst new building in the UK? It was described by the judges as: the “architectural embodiment of sea sickness, waves of nausea frozen in sheaths of glass and coloured aluminium that, when stared at for too long, summon queasiness, discomfort and, if you’re really unlucky, a reappearance of lunch as inevitably as puddles after a rainstorm?”

Response by Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development:

I am sure you work really hard on the Development Committee striving for high quality design in all new developments. You probably know that this was publically nominated but determined by a Panel of judges who have chosen this to be the carbuncle this year.

Supplementary question from Councillor Chris Chapman:

Is it not the fact that this award is a very sorry indictment of this administrations and its predecessor’s total lack of regard for the people on the Isle of Dogs. As a Member of the Development Committee, I am afraid I do see firsthand on many occasions the sheer level of dissatisfaction and exasperation for the people that live there that we always seem to be the ones that get the most ugly, carbuncle and nauseating buildings without the necessary infrastructure with poor construction planning that has an impact on local people and shows no real understanding. It is only because of the work of my colleague Councillor Andrew Wood under a Conservative party policy which is introducing local planning forums as part of its Localism Act, that we are actually seeing any action, certainly none from you.

Councillor Rachel Blake’s response to the supplementary question:

So I will answer your question and will also address the slightly more constructive question that came from one of your ward colleagues Councillor Ronald. You will be thrilled to hear Councillor Ronald that the urban design capacity within the Council’s Planning service has recently been strengthened with a view to maintaining a robust approach to high quality development design standards going forward. New members have also been invited to join the Council’s design panel, which I know you are particularly interested in, with a view to reinvigorating it and its role in terms of determining our contributions on the design of buildings.

I should also say and Councillor Chapman you will not be surprised to hear this, as you talk so much with Councillor Andrew Wood, that the Local Plan Review is underway and opportunities to strengthen existing policies will be considered within that process. I would also add that the idea that the Conservatives were the first to think about the involvement of local people in planning is absurd and if you want to talk more about what the Labour

Government did to consult people on local plans before they were action plans, I would be very happy to sit down with you and explain it to you.

I would also like to draw your attention to buildings in Tower Hamlets that have been commended for excellent design to highlight that picking on this award is a rather silly way to talk about design. We have got St Andrews in Bromley by Bow, the Peabody Estate in Shadwell, St Paul's school in Poplar that have received awards. They are not on the Isle of Dogs but if you want me to seek out designs in that area then, when we have the meeting on planning policy, I can draw them out.

8.9 Question from Councillor Helal Uddin:

Can the Mayor or Cabinet Member set out what measures the Council is taking to tackle anti-social behaviour?

Response by Councillor Shiria Khatun, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Community Safety:

The Mayor takes all queries around anti-social behaviour very seriously and as a result has commissioned an ASB strategy which we have not had before and we don't have now. This strategy will be looking at a coordinated approach to deal with the growing number of concerned residents that have come to us to report ASB.

I will talk very briefly about some of the Council activities involving intervention. We encourage residents to report ASB through using the 101 number and if it's an emergency to call 999. We also have the fortnightly ASB tasking group. This is a partnership group and areas are tasked to include ASB housing officers, Drug and Intervention Project workers, the Police Task Force, Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers and Rapid Response. They are then aligned to carry out tasks that have been agreed by the group.

I mentioned the Police Task Force team, that is something that the Mayor commissioned earlier this year and this particular group of police officers work with dealing with street prostitution and drug related issues. We also have now completed twenty action plans in each of the areas in Tower Hamlets that are updated on a quarterly basis.

Supplementary question from Councillor Helal Uddin:

As the Mayor touched on earlier in his announcement about a particular incident in the Bromley North/South area, would the Lead Member be in a position to make sure that the CCTV in the area concerned is being operating effectively and to also ensure that the Police visibility is increased. Obviously the Council has a responsibility and residents will be approaching us for information so I would like a response from the Leader Member, if not tonight but after the meeting would be helpful.

Councillor Shiria Khatun's response to the supplementary question:

The Mayor has actually gone one step further and has met up with the Borough Commander to talk about this particular incident that you have referred to. One of the things that we do encourage and this is something that the Mayor has done so through the Director of Children's Services is for schools to report any such incidences to the Police directly and to dial 999. As for CCTV cameras this is something that we will be looking at and as I mentioned the Mayor has already gone a step further and carried out quite a bit of work already.

8.11 Question from Councillor Denise Jones:

Residents frequently raise concerns about 'boy racers' in Wapping, and the increasing use of nitrous oxide across the borough. What steps are being taken by the Council, working with the police, to tackle these problems?

Response by Councillor Shiria Khatun, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Community Safety:

We are very aware of this particular problem, it is something that was raised at the mayoral assembly as well as the Safer Neighbourhood Boards question time.

One of the things that the Council has recently done is purchased something called the speed gun, which some Councillors have actually used. We did actually put out in the members bulletin if any other Councillors are interested in this to take this offer up. Another thing we are also doing is looking at ways to tackle laughing gas. This is something that we get a lot of residents coming up to me, particularly women, in my surgery talking about this particular problem. It is something that the Council is working proactively with the Police to come up with a solution. It is a tricky one, but it is something that the Mayor and I are taking very seriously and hopefully soon we will come up with a solution to alleviate this particular issue.

Supplementary question from Councillor Denise Jones:

I think it will be difficult enforce a ban or monitor the use of the substance because it is right across the borough, particularly in areas like Brick Lane, where we have the nightlife and so on and it is not just our residents that are leaving those deposits or using it.

Heavy use can cause anaemia and it takes away critical vitamins from your body and can go on to cause nerve damage and if it is not used with a balloon, but is used with masks and things like that, it can actually cause death, although there have not been that many examples of things like that in this country. So will the Mayor or you consider working with the Council's partners in the NHS and the Police to run a credible information campaign that stresses the dramatic differential in risk between the different forms of administering the canisters of laughing gas, as well as highlighting the health issues associated with its use?

If we can put out some sort of publicity about the dangers of it – I don't for one minute believe that as people are buying it they are going to read leaflets or anything – but we just need to get that message out that prolonged use can be very dangerous.

Councillor Shiria Khatun's response to the supplementary question:

Can I just reiterate, yes, the Mayor is taking this issue very seriously and not only are the Mayor and I working with the Police, but also with the rest of our partners from the Community Safety Partnership as well as our health friends, to look at a way in dealing with this particular problem.

8.12 Question from Councillor Andrew Wood:

Will the Mayor be encouraging support for the four residents who led the successful election petition who face financial problems due to the failure of former Mayor, Lutfur Rahman, to pay his court debts?

Response by Councillor Mayor John Biggs:

[The meeting was referred to the statement on election petitioners from the Mayor's Report, considered at Item 8 of the agenda. The extract is replicated below.]

“Election Petitioners: I am of course here following the election petition, disqualification of my predecessor and subsequent by-election. It distresses me that following the success of their challenge they now face ruinous legal bills. I will be writing urgently to the Prime Minister on this matter, as it appears to defy the rules of natural justice that this should happen.”

Supplementary question from Councillor Andrew Wood:

Quite a few residents have written to me and asked this question: why does the Council itself not clear the debts of the four petitioners, who are in the public gallery tonight, as it has benefited financially from the better governance since the removal of Lutfur Rahman?

One thing I think we could help them with is that they have launched a funding appeal online and I think that it would be good if all of us present in this room tonight could try and re-Twitter that appeal and try and spread their message as widely as possible in our own communication with our own residents. To try and make as many people in Tower Hamlets aware that they can go online and, very quickly, in a minute or two, donate even a small amount of money to these people that have helped us so much.

Mayor John Biggs response to the supplementary question:

That is an intriguing question, to which I do not know the answer. I guess it would not ordinarily be the case that the Council would pay other people's

legal fees unless it was party to the action, but I don't really know the answer or the legalities, but I am very happy to go away and look at that as a possibility, as I feel a public service has been performed. Obviously I have a self interest in saying that, as it allows me to spend glorious hours in your company Councillor Wood, but nevertheless it has been a public service for the greater good than just that.

I agree with [the proposal to promote the petitioners' online funding appeal] and would love it if we had the power to levy the Independent Group to help with this as I feel they played more than a simple contributory part to the circumstances in which we find ourselves in and the petitioners as well. I am planning to write to the Prime Minister on this as I think it is a very important issue. I am happy to do so alongside the leader of your group if that is helpful and if you wanted to be party to that, because I think there is a fundamental issue here. It is the sort of issue which will tend never to be at the top of the list in terms of parliamentary time, but it is a fundamental injustice if people make a sacrifice like this they are not in some way indemnified for their risk.

8.13 Question from Councillor Danny Hassell:

Can the lead member please update the council on the steps that have been taken to campaign for access to Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, (PrEP) for residents of Tower Hamlets who are at greatest risk of HIV?

Response by Councillor Amy Whitelock-Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Services:

As you know, the campaign around PrEP is something I have taken a personal interest in and I am pleased to report that we have been proactive locally both in engaging with the national campaign and ensuring local residents are informed. Last month, I called publicly for confirmation that local residents who have been receiving PrEP as part of the local trial will have their drugs extended. I am pleased to report three key developments:

- Unfortunately NHS England have appealed the judicial review decision, but the local Government Association is now engaging with councils, including us, in relation to that appeal;
- The participants in the PROUD study, locally and across the country who have been involved in those trials – we have just had confirmation recently that the manufacturers of that drug will extend provision of the drug for a further six months, which is really good news and I am glad they have responded to calls from charities and from local councillors like me to do that and thirdly;
- NHS England are now consulting on a future commissioning policy for PrEP (despite the fact that they also are challenging the appeal). We've been promoting that consultation and it would be great if Members could support us in promoting that to local residents.

Supplementary question from Councillor Danny Hassell:

Can I join campaigners in thanking you and the Mayor for the leadership you have shown on this issue, particularly in lobbying for the drug to be made available to those who are on the trial. Can the lead member confirm that the Council will continue to do all it can to support organisations who are campaigning and lobbying for this through the support of the information given from the LGA etc?

Councillor Amy Whitelock-Gibbs' response to the supplementary question:

We will continue to engage with this important issue and I want to pay tribute to the national charities that have been really leading this work and to the LGA that have been representing councils as well.

Questions 8.2, 8.6, 8.10 were not put due to the absence of the questioners. Questions 8.14 - 25 were not put due to lack of time. Written responses would be provided to the questions. (Note: The written responses are included in Appendix 'A' to these minutes.)

9. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES**9.1 Report from Cabinet: Substance Misuse Strategy 2016-19**

The Council considered the report of the Chief Executive (and Acting Corporate Director, Communities, Localities and Culture) submitting the proposed Substance Misuse Strategy 2016-19 for approval.

The recommendations set out in the report were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

That the Council note:

1. That the Substance Misuse Strategy 2016-2019 is part of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy in Tower Hamlets (the Community Safety Plan);
2. That as the Substance Misuse Strategy 2016-2019 is part of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy then pursuant to the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, the Mayor as the Executive has responsibility for preparing the draft strategy for submission to the full Council to adopt;
3. That the draft Substance Misuse Strategy 2016-2019 and Action Plan have been approved by strategic partners for adoption by their respective organisations;

4. That at the Cabinet meeting on 26th July 2016 the Mayor approved the draft Substance Misuse Strategy 2016-2019 and recommended it to full Council for adoption;

That the Council approve:

5. The adoption of the Substance Misuse Strategy 2016-2019

9.2 Annual Report to the Council by the Independent Person

The Council considered the Annual Report for 2015/16 of the Independent Person appointed in accordance with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011.

The recommendation set out in the report was put to the vote and was **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

1. To note the content of the report.

10. TO RECEIVE REPORTS AND QUESTIONS ON JOINT ARRANGEMENTS/EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS (IF ANY)

There was no business to transact under this agenda item.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

11.1 Treasury Management Quarterly Update Report for Quarter Ended June 2016

The Council considered the report of the Corporate Director, Resources in respect of treasury management activities for the quarter ending 30 June 2016.

The recommendations set out in the report were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council note the contents of the treasury management activities and performance against targets for quarter ending 30 June 2016;
2. That the Council note the Council's investments which are outstanding as at 30 June 2016 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report. The balance outstanding at that time was £452.95m which includes £73m, pension fund cash awaiting investment in early July;

3. That the Council agree to increasing investments over a year monetary limit from £50m to £100m as set out in section 3.12.3 of the report.
4. That the Council approve increasing monetary limit and duration of part nationalised banks from £25m and 3 years to £50m and 5 years as set out in section 3.12.4 of the report.

11.2 The Roles of the Mayor and the Chief Executive and the delegation of powers

The Council considered the report of the Acting Corporate Director, Law Probity and Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer proposing changes/clarifications to the Constitution in relation to the powers and duties of the Mayor and Chief Executive.

The recommendations set out in the report were put to the vote and were **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council note and approve the additional clarity to the roles of the Mayor and the Chief Executive;
2. That the Council agree the proposed constitutional changes set out in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.13 and Appendices 2 to 4 of the report and that the Constitution be revised accordingly.

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Procedural Motion

Councillor Danny Hassell **moved** and Councillor Rachael Saunders **seconded**, a procedural motion “that under Procedure Rule 14.1.3 the order of business be varied as follows:

- Item 12.1 - Motion regarding the Housing and Planning Act.
- Item 12.4 - Motion regarding Increasing Organ and Blood Donation in Tower Hamlets.
- Item 12.6 - Motion regarding Electoral Petition Costs.
- Item 12.3 - Motion regarding the 2016 Carbuncle Award.
- Item 12.7 - Motion regarding pollution near schools.
- Item 12.5 -Motion regarding the future of the Tower Hamlets Youth Service.

The motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

12.1 Motion regarding the Housing and Planning Act

Councillor Andrew Cregan **moved** and Councillor Sirajul Islam **seconded** the motion as printed in the agenda.

Following debate, the motion was put to the vote and was **agreed**. Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

This Council Notes that:

1. The Housing and Planning Act ('the Act') received Royal Assent on 12th May 2016.
2. The Council debated and supported a motion (20th January 2016) which called on the Mayor and all Councillors to actively campaign to highlight the disastrous consequences of the then Bill; and called on the Mayor to give full consideration to finding meaningful, genuinely affordable housing solutions for Tower Hamlets.
3. The Mayor and/or Cabinet Members have subsequently attended public meetings organised by 'Kill the Bill' on the Cranbrook, Collingwood, Ocean estates and outside Albert Jacob House and confirmed their commitment to attend others as invited.
4. LBTH Officers have attended public meetings on Collingwood and Ocean estates to set out the technical aspects of the Act.
5. The Mayor launched the Housing Strategy consultation which closed on 31st July
6. East End Life, Our East End, and 24 Hour Housing have all published articles setting out the Mayor's opposition to this Act and his response to the impact.
7. An all members briefing on the Draft Housing Strategy including the impact of the Housing and Planning Act was held on 2nd June 2016.
8. The Housing and Regeneration Mayors Question Time in Poplar included an officer briefing for residents on the Housing and Planning Act.
9. An article in THH newsletter and information has been circulated to all RPs for their newsletters.
10. The Tower Hamlets website features a detailed summary of the Act and the impact on Tower Hamlets at http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/housing/Housing_and_Planning_Act.aspx

11. LBTH has responded to Government consultations on details of the Act and responses are available at http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/housing/Housing_and_Planning_Act.aspx
12. In order to fully prepare for the impact of the Act, further guidance is required from Government regarding the implementation.
13. The Council is organising a Housing Strategy Conference for residents on 1st October 2016 to discuss the Council's future Housing Strategy, responding to the Housing and Planning Act.

This Council believes that:

1. The Housing and Planning Act represents a Conservative attack on the diverse communities in Tower Hamlets and it will significantly impede the council's ability to provide adequate affordable housing for families in the borough.
2. The Tory 'Pay to Stay' policy will drive up rents and have a devastating effect in Tower Hamlets.
3. The Government should publish guidance on the implementation of 'Pay to Stay' and 'Sale of High Value Voids' to allow Councils to fully prepare.

This Council calls on:

1. The Mayor to write to the Minister of State for Housing and Planning setting out the impact of the uncertainty over the Act.
2. Our local Labour MPs to raise questions in Parliament about how the Act will be implemented and how it will impact Tower Hamlets.

Motions 12.2 -12.7 were not debated due to lack of time.

The meeting ended at 10.20 p.m.

Speaker of the Council