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**Executive Mayor's Office**

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Dear Will,

It is now over eighteen months since my election as Mayor of Tower Hamlets, and just over a year since you became our Chief Executive. As 2017 begins, and we set our Budget for the next three years, this is a good time to write to you restating my priorities for Tower Hamlets and how I believe the Council needs to continue to change so that it can serve residents better.

When I was elected we were in a crisis following the removal of my predecessor, and we have spent much of our time since then tackling and resolving those areas of weak management and compromised leadership. This has proved tougher than expected. Meeting this challenge was necessary, and we have made good progress together, but we must now transform the Council into a more outward looking, responsive, and delivery focused body.

It is worth restating my vision for Tower Hamlets, as expressed in our Strategic Plan. This has two key strands. First, a commitment to making every neighbourhood in the borough a great place to live, with excellent universal public services and a high quality environment for all communities to enjoy. And second, a determination to build a more socially just, compassionate, and enabling borough, in which vulnerable people are able to live with dignity and security, in which our diverse communities are treated with respect, and in which we both directly support those residents who need us and also better enable all residents to help themselves.

That is why, for example, we want to be a council that offers excellent social services that meet the needs of the vulnerable, but also one that plays a bigger role in maximising jobs and training for residents so that growth reduces inequality, rather than entrenching it. We shouldn't forget the enormous energy that most people bring with them to our borough and the massive benefit that can be achieved if we can help them to unlock it.

### **Key Priorities**

People deserve, expect and pay for high quality services. Our overriding goal must be to turn Tower Hamlets into an excellent council, with the ambition to achieve the best for our citizens. There are four key priorities that I expect the Council to place a particular focus on in 2017, while we continue to improve our overall management of services and delivery of all Strategic Plan targets and carry out the necessary changes driven by our budget:

a) **Cleaner Streets.** Our residents want to live in places they are proud of, and we must support that with better waste and refuse arrangements and an improved public realm in priority neighbourhoods. This must include cleanliness, better lighting, attractive open spaces and a better enforcement regime where we are being let down. I would like to see a comprehensive approach to this agenda brought forward.

b) **Safer Communities.** Every citizen should feel safe and secure in their home, street or estate. The council must have a clear plan to tackle anti-social behaviour, with a transformed community safety service that works more effectively with partners to respond to resident concerns. This must include work to effect behaviour change amongst the minority of residents who aren't acting responsibly, for example with our youth and outreach services, and in partnership with others. I would like the new ASB strategy to be brought to Cabinet.

c) **Greater Prosperity.** We have a responsibility to ensure all of our residents share in the growth of our borough, and can access local jobs and training, and other opportunities. We should ensure that a refreshed Workpath service offers tailored support for those that need it, and help to shape a new and comprehensive offer for young people post-16.

d) **Quality of Life.** Our residents are incredibly creative, diverse, and dynamic, and we should be enabling them to access more cultural, community, and leisure activities. A new leisure strategy should set out how we will meet the demand for sport and exercise facilities, and I also want to see significant improvement to our capacity to deliver smaller capital projects, such as the community hubs programme, sports facilities, environmental improvements, and in parks.

All areas of the council's work are of course important but I would ask that you provide particular personal attention to the improvement of service in the four priority areas over the next period, and report back to me with milestones and a clear outline of target dates by February 2017.

### **Achieving Excellence**

My proposed three-year Budget seeks to ensure that our resources are aligned more effectively to meet these priorities, and the new structure you have put in place from January 2017 should better enable us to deliver our priorities by encouraging cross-council working. Under our leadership, our Council's management must be creative and innovative in achieving this, challenging any culture of organisational convenience in the pursuit of excellence. This council must be an exciting, challenging place to work so we can attract and retain the best staff, who want to work here to grow professionally and to achieve for residents.

In order to make real progress we require all departments and staff to understand that they are part of the Council's wider mission to serve residents better. And we must continue to improve the culture of the council into one that is outward-looking, confident, and ambitious for residents. Therefore there are four key outcomes that I would like you to deliver in 2017:

i) **Refreshing the Strategic Plan.** Last year we adopted a new plan that set out how the Council's priorities for action and how my manifesto commitments would be implemented. It is important that all the leaders in the organisation, including my Cabinet, feel ownership of the priorities and outcomes in the Plan, and are held accountable for its delivery. Therefore now is an appropriate time to refresh the actions and success measures, and put in place a framework to assess our progress against the Plan and also the measures contained in the Budget.

ii) **Preparing for the exit of the Commissioners.** We have made real progress this year in facing up to, understanding, and tackling the underlying problems that led to the imposition of Directions in

several areas by the Secretary of State in 2014 and 2015. It is important that we are well-prepared to assume full control when Directions are lifted, and I need your assurance that there is a strong culture of compliance and transparency across the Council. I expect you to outline how best we can demonstrate this to the Secretary of State, and how in turn this culture can be further embedded, and self-reinforced, when they are gone.

iii) **Embedding an outward looking council culture.** Tower Hamlets has been insular for too long. It is important that we recognise the council cannot achieve our vision on its own. Only by working with residents, partners and local businesses can we unleash our potential to deliver excellent services, attract investment and provide real opportunity for all. We must also listen to and learn from people's experience to ensure we meet the needs of all our communities – from the most articulate to the quietest voices. As part of this I would like you to establish a new strategic partnership that has more effective arrangements for working with partners and residents, with the goal of producing a new Community Plan in 2018. We must also continue to improve how we communicate with our residents, including sharing our positive achievements to build trust and extend understanding of our mission.

iv) **Improving delivery of the capital programme.** Producing a three-year revenue budget has been a step in the right direction for our borough, but it has confirmed my view of the need for closer political oversight of our capital budget. I would like you to formulate a proposal by which the Mayor and Cabinet can receive regular advice on (and make clear recommendations about) the formulation and delivery of the Capital Strategy, including the asset management and disposals policy and the prioritisation of capital resources, as well as receiving reports about the progress of major projects, including the delivery of the new Civic Centre in Whitechapel, and our plan to build 1000 new council homes for rent.

Again, I would ask that you provide personal attention to these areas over the next period, and report back to me with milestones and a timeline at the earliest opportunity.

Tower Hamlets is one of the most diverse and vibrant parts of the greatest city on earth. It's a great place to be, and a place with much unfulfilled potential. It's time for this council to step up and become a council that the people of Tower Hamlets can be proud of. I hope this letter will be helpful to you and your team in understanding my ambition and vision for the borough, and how I believe we can deliver it. I look forward to your response and anticipate the delivery of these objectives will be considered as part of the cross-party performance appraisal process.

Yours sincerely,

John Biggs  
Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets