



Meeting of the

Tower Hamlets Council

Tabled papers

Wednesday, 2 October 2024 at 7.00 p.m.

VENUE

Council Chamber,
Whitechapel Town Hall
160 Whitechapel Road,
London E1 1BJ

Further information about this meeting is available in the main agenda.

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London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Council



Supplemental Agenda

Wednesday, 2 October 2024

7.00 p.m.

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| 7. | ADMINISTRATION MOTION DEBATE
Labour amendment. | 3 - 4 |
| 8. | OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE
Aspire amendment. | 5 - 6 |



Agenda Item 7

LABOUR AMENDMENT TO THE ADMINISTRATION MOTION FOR DEBATE ON WINTER FUEL PAYMENTS REDRESS

Proposer: Cllr Marc Francis

Seconder: Cllr Amina Ali

Additions in Red and Underline
Deletions in Red and Struckthrough

Council notes:

- The difficult position that many residents – especially pensioners – find themselves in when paying bills around wintertime.
- That many residents in Tower Hamlets could have to make the choice between eating and heating this winter.
- That the Council continues to do all it can to support residents through the ongoing cost of living crisis.
- That through schemes such as the Warm Hubs and Warm Packs, pensioners will be able to go somewhere warm for a hot drink and receive hats, gloves, socks, hot water bottles and other amenities to help keep them warm and save money on their bills.
- The last Labour Government introduced the Winter Fuel Payment in 1999 in recognition that many older people were struggling with the costs of their gas and electric bills;
- By 2005, the sum paid was set at £300 for over-80s and £200 for those pensioners under-80 and that this figure has not increased for nearly 20 years;

Council believes:

- The new Government has inherited a dire economic situation, which will require it to make difficult decisions;
- That while these measures and the forthcoming investment into universal free homecare in February will go some way to alleviating these pressures, a cold winter could see vulnerable, elderly residents choosing between heating and eating.
- That around 9,000 pension-age residents who would have been eligible for a winter fuel payment will now not be receiving one.
- That there are also 4,304 residents who are eligible for pension credit who appear to not be claiming.
- That no pensioner or household should have to choose between eating and heating.
- That the Council must therefore provide support for elderly and vulnerable residents in the months to come, to offset any financial strain that will impact those already among the 40% currently living in fuel poverty in Tower Hamlets.

Council resolves:

- ~~• To request the creation a *Mayor's Winter Emergency Fund*, to provide those pensioners without pension credit but struggling to make ends meet with financial support with their bills.~~
- To call on the Executive Mayor to instruct officers to establish a local 'Tower Hamlets Winter Fuel Payment' scheme offering sums of £300 to those over-80 and £200 to those under-80, who are not in receipt of Pension Credit and write to local pensioners inviting them to apply;
- To provide pensioners in a precarious financial position with a payment towards their winter fuel bills. This would see residents of pension age but ineligible for the scrapped *Winter Fuel Allowance* payments receive a payment.
- To launch this scheme at the earliest available Cabinet, with details of how to apply and eligibility in place by then.
- To write to the government requesting the reinstatement of the *Winter Fuel Allowance*.
- To back the public campaign by Age UK and other charities and the trade union movement to try to persuade the Government to reinstate the Winter Fuel Payment.
- To actively promote through a borough-wide campaign how to access pension credit, so those 4,304 residents eligible for pension credit but not claiming it can understand how to do so.

ASPIRE AMENDMENT TO OPPOSITION MOTION FOR DEBATE Scrap the Revised Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy

Proposed by: Cllr XXX

Seconded by: Cllr XXX

Additions in Red and Underline

Deletions in Red and Struckthrough

This council notes:

- In July, the Mayor and Cabinet adopted a revised 'Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy.'
- The revised policy removed the 90-minute journey time limit, allowing the council to place families and individuals experiencing homelessness in temporary accommodation beyond the Home Counties.
- For the record, following feedback from residents – through the Mayor's surgeries; member enquiries; and face to face meetings – at the 11th September Cabinet meeting, the Mayor clearly stated that the decision was not being implemented until there had been a further review and this has the effect of retaining the 90 minute cap for the present time.
- This decision contradicted the 90-minute journey time limit established by the Supreme Court in the Westminster test case, which determined that families should not be placed in accommodation further than 90 minutes from their home. This policy was not implemented following the Council's Cabinet meeting on 11th September.
- Under the policy, those in their final year of GCSEs or A-Levels are to be placed in temporary accommodation within the borough.
- Children in other school year groups can be placed anywhere within London.
- Families with very young children, who are not yet of school age, may be placed in temporary accommodation anywhere in the Home Counties. This policy was not implemented at the Council's Cabinet meeting on 11th September. It should be noted that within the paused policy there was a detailed set of criteria that made placement in Zones C and D a last resort, meaning that this group would have been protected. In any event, no family will be placed more than 90 minutes outside of Tower Hamlets, as the Council has not implemented the decision to remove the 90 minute cap at the last Cabinet meeting on 11th September.
- People with health needs, including mental health concerns, should be rehoused in temporary accommodation (TA) either within or close to the borough, to ensure they can access necessary support services.
- There has been a rise in Section 21 (no-fault) evictions over the past two years, leading to an increased number of residents declaring themselves homeless to the council.
- Placing working residents in temporary accommodation in distant areas, such as Zones C and D, risks forcing them to leave their jobs, further contributing to poverty among affected families. However, this proposed amendment to the existing policy was not implemented at the Council's Cabinet meeting on the

11th September, meaning no working resident is being placed more than 90 minutes outside of the borough.

- The Greater London Authority (GLA) has announced £40 million in new funding aimed at procuring homes for overcrowded and homeless families.
- Of this, £8.3 million from the Government has been allocated specifically to Tower Hamlets Council, with a mandate to purchase 32 homes for use as temporary accommodation. The Council has also begun a process of buybacks; increasing of temporary accommodation funding from it's HRA account; and an accelerated fast track planning process to complement this allocation of funding, as well as an ambitious newbuild housing programme.
- It is acknowledged that high rents in Tower Hamlets make it unaffordable for residents affected by the benefit cap to continue living here, putting additional strain on homeless families.

The Council believes:

- Relocating families away from their support networks can have a detrimental impact on the wellbeing and education of children. That is why the proposed change to the existing policy were not implemented at the September 11th Cabinet meeting, meaning no resident will move more than 90 minutes outside of the borough.
- The best outcomes for families experiencing homelessness are achieved when they are placed in a locality where they can easily access support services and maintain existing social ties.
- The Council was right to retain the 90-minute journey time limit ~~should be reinstated, and the~~ by not implementing the revised 'Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy' ~~should be reversed~~ at the September 11th Cabinet meeting.
- Introducing a ban on no-fault evictions would relieve pressure on homelessness and help stabilise rental prices.
- The Council should explore homes purchased by the Council using GLA and Government funds should have rents capped at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, ensuring affordability for benefit-capped households.
- The Mayor and Lead Member have already commissioned work to understand what work and potential additional investment is required to bolster the Council's efforts in this area and More should be done to explore procuring properties within the existing boundaries.

This council resolves to:

- Recommend to the Mayor that a new report is presented at the next Cabinet meeting, confirming the reversing of the 'Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy' adopted in July and paused at the September 11th Cabinet meeting.
- Explore ways to use GLA and Government funding to purchase properties where rents ~~can~~ could be capped at LHA rates, ensuring more affordable housing for homeless and overcrowded families.