

Aspire Amendment of the Opposition Motion for Debate – Emergency Budget

Proposed: Councillor Kabir Ahmed

Seconded: Councillor Maium Talukdar

Additions in red and underlined

Deletions in red and struck through

This Council notes:

- The steep increases in the costs of energy and food since the war in Ukraine began in February 2022 and the impact this is already having on Tower Hamlets' poorest residents;
- Councillors agreed a woefully inadequate £200,000 increase in the Residents Support Scheme (Local Welfare Assistance) in the 2022/23 Budget meeting in March specifically to help residents struggling with their energy bills;
- Councillors also agreed an additional £370,000 in the same Full Council meeting for the continuation of the Food Distribution Hub in 2022/23;
- The People of Tower Hamlets were not impressed with the measures and voted for a new approach.
- With this resounding mandate, the Mayor has already agreed a Cost of Living package worth nearly £3 million at Cabinet on 11th July 2022 and agreed to incorporate his Manifesto into Council Policy at this Council Meeting.

This Council believes:

- This cost of living crisis demands an urgent response from both central, regional and local government if we are to prevent even worse levels of poverty and destitution;
- The Chancellor's statement on 26th May ~~only goes a small way~~ is nowhere near sufficient in easing the cost of living crisis, especially for those on the lowest incomes;
- Tower Hamlets Council is now set to receive income significantly higher than originally anticipated in February 2021 and even March 2022 ~~and that while~~. While some of this is due to be allocated, enough remains to ~~give some scope for ringfence~~ further measures funds to be reserved for future investment to support Tower Hamlets' poorest residents over the next two years.

This Council therefore resolves:

- ~~• To call on the Mayor of Tower Hamlets to bring forward a full Emergency Budget, including the following measures specifically designed to ease the financial burden on our poorest residents over the years 2022/23 and 2023/24:~~
- ~~• To increase the “Standard Utilities Allowance” used in the calculation of Homecare charges from £5 a week back to £15 a week as of 1st April 2022 (estimated cost – £250,000);~~
- ~~• To allocate a sum of £500,000 to top-up the Discretionary Housing Payment funding pot to the same level as 2021/22, so LBTH can help more tenants affected by the Tory Government’s “Bedroom Tax”, Benefit Cap and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) “freeze” on their Housing Benefit / Universal Credit entitlement;~~
- ~~• To allocate a £500,000 Council Tax “Hardship Fund” for residents struggling with these bills, including self-employed residents affected by the use of DWP’s Minimum Income Floor in calculating their entitlement to Council Tax Support and disabled residents whose Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is included as “income”;~~
- ~~• Set aside a total sum of £100,000 to award one-off grants to the voluntary food banks operating in Tower Hamlets in 2022/23 so that they are better able to ensure no one goes hungry in the East End this year;~~
- ~~• Add a further one-off top-up of £200,000 to LBTH’s own Residents Support Scheme pot to help those who are unable to afford essential white goods, utility bills or who are in difficulty with priority debts;~~
- ~~• Allocate an additional sum of £150,000 to the School Uniform Grant funding to enable an increase in the £110 allowance per child agreed in 2019/20 and a second payment to be made for each eligible child, for example when starting Primary School;~~
- ~~• Fully utilise the expected £1.75 million allocated from the Department for Education’s Holiday Activity & Food Programme (HAFP) in 2022/23 and aside an additional sum of £250,000 to cover the removal of contingency funding so as to ensure every child in receipt of free school meals has access to a nourishing lunchtime meal throughout the summer holidays;~~
- ~~• Explore options for the immediate extension of Free School Meals from September 2022 onwards to the parents of secondary school children where they are in receipt of Universal Credit, but currently have a household income of more than £7,400.~~

- To congratulate the Mayor on the historic win in the May elections and the clear mandate this gives him to implement his manifesto.

- To support all measures needed to implement the will of the People

- To give the Mayor the time and space to implement the Vision he put before the People of Tower Hamlets, outlined in the Aspire Manifesto and confirmed at this Full Council meeting.

- This includes:
 - Freezing Council Tax for four years
 - Investing in the provision of care for vulnerable members of the Borough, both adults and children
 - Providing sufficient remuneration for care workers o ensure they are adequately rewarded for their work and not left to struggle from day to day
 - Protecting tenants from revenge and unfair evictions
 - Establishing a homelessness fund to protect those living rough in the Borough and those in temporary accommodation
 - Establishing a fund to support young people who want to stay in education post 16, ensuring they are not punished for their family's income or background, or prevented from pursuing their ambitions and potential.

- This Council also resolves to adopt and implement with urgency the Strategic Plan designed by the Mayor and Officers to be agreed at the next Cabinet on the 1st of August, to accelerate the implementation of the above-mentioned measures.