

## ASPIRE AMENDMENT TO THE LABOUR MOTION FOR DEBATE ON BEST VALUE

**Proposer:** TBC

**Seconder:** TBC

Additions underlined

Deletions struckthrough

### **This Council Notes:**

1. The Best Value Inspection Report, commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, identified areas where the Council has not met its Best Value Duty ~~under the current administration led by Mayor Lutfur Rahman and Aspire.~~
2. The report raises concerns about the Council's culture, noting:
  - “The lack of trust between councillors, officers, and partners is extremely worrying and is not conducive to good governance and decision-making.” (Section 3.4). This is a culture that has been exacerbated over the previous seven years, with several key failings identified by the report under the purview of the previous administration.
3. Leadership and accountability are highlighted as areas for improvement, with the report stating:
  - “The perception of many interviewees was that many good managers had exited the organisation as a result of ‘speaking truth to power.’” (Section 4.50). However, as per section 4.10, the council was praised for permanently appointing a Chief Executive Officer; Section 151 officer and several other key director positions. This has since been supplemented by the permanent appointment of all statutory officers, and all Corporate Directors. This was never realised under the previous administration.
  - That several historical failings, including a failure to sign off historic accounts; unpaid VAT receipts; the overpayment of social care contracts to the tune of over £60million; and failure to submit five years of annual governance statements, have contributed to this perception of a lack of accountability and leadership.
  - “Inspectors found the council’s scrutiny culture to be ‘weak and confused,’ with ‘The level of challenge or in-depth scrutiny offered, or exhibited has in our view been inadequate.’” (Sections 10.17 and 5.120) The Council is already in the process of implementing a scrutiny improvement plan. This improvement is also confirmed by Minister in the draft directions provided to the council.
4. A staff survey conducted by the inspection team revealed that 48% of respondents expressed discomfort in raising concerns, and only 27% believed their concerns would be appropriately dealt with. ~~The report also notes:~~

- ~~“We have seen evidence that staff are also concerned by some appointments and consider them inappropriate. In our staff survey we heard about a ‘friends and family culture,’ ‘cronyism’ and that some staff are concerned that existing relationships between councillors and officers changes the way work is done in the Council.”~~  
(Section 4.4)
  - It should also be noted that of a staff cohort of over 5,000, only 300 members of staff were interviewed.
5. The report expresses concerns about the Council’s capacity to improve without external oversight:
- “They found insufficient evidence that the organisation is open and transparent, and values the constructive criticism required to drive improvement. The Inspectors therefore express concern that the Authority will not make sufficient progress to deliver and embed these changes without external accountability.”  
(Letter from SoS to CEX 12/11/24)
  - However, the government believes that the tools are there – through existing building blocks such as the Transformation Advisory Board – to work collaboratively to achieve the improvements required.
  - Similarly, the council has earmarked £6million in funding for a continuous improvement fund to support the continuing of this improvement journey.

### **This Council Believes:**

1. The findings in the Best Value Inspection Report highlight serious challenges for the Council's governance and leadership, ~~with potential implications for the effective delivery of essential services to residents.~~ However, section 3.6 and other parts of the report commend service delivery and staff pride in their work. Indeed, this was confirmed by the recent Ofsted inspection of Children’s service, that found the council was ‘outstanding’.
2. Addressing concerns about the Council’s culture, accountability, and scrutiny processes is vital to rebuilding trust and ensuring high standards of governance. There is a responsibility on all members, on both sides of the chamber, to contribute to this rebuilding.
3. Staff, officers, and residents deserve a Council that operates with transparency, respect, and accountability, prioritising professionalism and inclusivity.
4. External oversight can play a constructive role in supporting the Council to address systemic issues and implement meaningful reform.

### **This Council Resolves To:**

1. Acknowledge the ~~findings of the Best Value Inspection Report~~ directions emerging from the Best Value Inspection Report and commit to taking sincere action to address the challenges it highlights.
2. Collaborate fully with the appointed government envoy and statutory support team, welcoming their expertise and input in driving improvements. The Council will work constructively with external leads on governance, leadership, and culture to restore confidence in its operations.
3. Ensure work is taken to include all political groups in the improvement process and include opposition members on the transformation board.
4. Prioritise creating an open and collaborative culture within the Council, ensuring staff and residents feel their voices are heard and valued in the decision-making process.