

## **BUDGET COUNCIL MEETING – 22<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY 2012**

### **AMENDMENT TO AGENDA ITEM 5.1: BUDGET & COUNCIL TAX 2012/13**

**Amendment proposed by: Cllr Kabir Ahmed**

**Amendment seconded by: Cllr Maium Miah**

This Council notes the progressive budget proposals from Mayor Rahman and his administration, which will see:

1. No closures of Leisure Centres, Children's Centres, Youth Services, Libraries or Ideas Stores
2. Protection for the elderly and vulnerable, including free homecare
3. The protection of frontline and low paid staff
4. 17 additional police officers
5. The Mayor's Education Award to replace the scrapped EMA scheme

This Council notes the following economic challenges and central government failings:

1. The unprecedented funding cuts from the Conservative led Coalition Government, which for 2012/2013 will see a funding reduction of 27% and a funding gap from 2011/2012 to 2014/2015 of £100m.
2. The current record high levels of youth unemployment: According to national figures released earlier this year, one in five young people are not in employment, education or training and a quarter of a million have been unemployed for over a year.
3. The complete cut in Aim Higher Funding. The Labour Government's Aim Higher programme's £136m budget was scrapped in July 2011. This programme helped young people from low income families and from families in which no one had attended higher education, to access university places.
4. The massive changes to welfare benefit, including to housing benefit, which will make living in the borough unaffordable for many families who have lived here for generations, and will make our aspiration to create a Tower Hamlets for everyone, much harder to achieve.

This Council notes the following excellent progress made in education and the support the Mayor and administration have provided locally for education:

1. Our excellent education results: This year we were the second most improved borough nationally, with 61.4% of students in the borough achieving at least five A\* to C grades including English and Maths, the highest ever figure for Tower Hamlets.
2. The ongoing support for our young people and their educational progress, including the Mayor's Education Award, 1:1 tuition at GCSE and A-Level and support for early GCSEs.

This Council Notes the following concerning the borough's environment and green spaces:

1. That as one of the Olympic host boroughs we have benefited from investment into the borough's green spaces, including the refurbishment of Altab Ali Park and Victoria Park, and the renovation of Mile End Stadium.
2. The borough has one of the highest population densities in London, one of the highest levels of high-rise housing and high levels of overcrowding.

This Council Notes the following resource implications:

1. The Council currently has a healthy level of reserves, expected to be £144m in March this year.
2. The emerging risks and opportunities, as identified by the Director of Resources and laid out on appendix 6.1.

This Council Believes:

1. That these risks and opportunities must be balanced responsibly with the needs of Tower Hamlets residents and the opportunity to invest in the borough's future.

This Council Resolves:

1. Due to the timing of these proposals it is suggested that expenditure be increased in the following areas, with funding allocated for the year 12/13 from reserves, with a commitment to mainstreaming funds for these proposals, where appropriate, in light of next year's grant settlement from Central Government.

### **In relation to employment and raising aspiration**

Allocate £260k to support a Mayor's Aim Higher Scheme for 1 year, with a commitment to find funds for it to be an ongoing provision.

- This will provide a budget to fund new council employees tasked to work with, and in, schools, as well as funding for advice, training programmes, away days, workshops and masterclasses.
- The aim of the service will be to raise the higher education and career aspirations of young people in Tower Hamlets. As well as help young people from low income families, and from families in which no one has attended higher education, to access places at higher education and the bursaries available.

### **In relation to unaffordable living costs**

Allocate a one-off sum of £20,000 to support the development of a London Living Rent Accreditation scheme.

- This will further investigate the proposals made by Shelter on creating a scheme that links rent to earnings. This would keep Tower Hamlets at the forefront of the provision of affordable housing and see our borough as a leader in this area, as we were with the London Living Wage.

### **In relation to the borough's green spaces**

Double the Service Level Agreements for Mudchute Farm and Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park next year, with a commitment to find funds for this to be an ongoing increase.

- This will support the excellent work of two community organisations.
- This will help ensure the ongoing provision of high standard green amenity space for the people of the borough.
- In Mudchute Farm the use of these additional funds will support their delivery of services for young people, to ensure more young people access open spaces, outdoor play and volunteering.
- In Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park the use of these additional funds will support their biodiversity training, volunteering programmes and their after school club, as well as help maintain the site to a high standard for the use and enjoyment by residents.