

Budget Council Meeting – 27th February 2013

Independent Amendment

Proposer: Cllr Rania Khan

Seconder: Cllr Abdul Asad

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

1. A borough we can be proud of and which is environmentally friendly; including ten new THEOs, a potholes squad, new cycling infrastructure, a new Burial Ground, £1m further investment into our Faith Buildings and £800,000 on a borough wide deep clean.
2. Investment in our young people; continuing our MEA scheme, providing 400 Mayor's University Grants and free school meals for all children in reception and year one for the next two years.
3. Bringing investment into key areas of the borough; bringing improvements into and promoting Roman Road, Burdett Road, Brick Lane and Bethnal Green Market.
4. Keeping more money into residents' pockets; freezing council tax and fees and charges and maintaining council tax benefit and creating a £1m Preventing Homelessness Fund.

This Council notes the following in relation to the borough's rich heritage and culture:

1. Tower Hamlets has an exceptionally rich history which has been shaped by the different people who have lived and worked here; the movements that started here and have grown to be national and global forces for changes; our links to royalty; and our role as the economic powerhouse of London and the country.
2. Tower Hamlets is currently facing the fastest pace of change and development in the country. This development is creating jobs, new houses and a borough fit for the future.
3. In light of this new development, there is a commitment from both residents and the administration of the borough to ensure that the history and heritage of the borough is preserved and celebrated.
4. That Cultural Industries are one of the fastest growth areas in the borough, with currently over 30,000 jobs in cultural and creative industries in Tower Hamlets.
5. The Enterprise Strategy identified the importance of cultural industries for the borough's economic future.

This Council notes the following central government cuts to culture and heritage:

1. The Suspension of English Heritage's Blue Plaque scheme in January 2013, due cuts in government funding. The scheme is being wound down, with only approved plaques being installed and no new suggestions from the public being taken.

2. The sustained funding reductions from central government sources towards arts and cultural activities, including the 30% reduction in funding to the Arts Council; the scrapping of the UK Film Council and Museums, Libraries and Archives Council; and the collective impact of reduced funding availability on the ability for cultural services to continue to run.

This Council notes the following in regards to the borough's disabled and elderly residents and the third sector:

1. Tower Hamlets has a larger number of residents receiving disability benefits and with limiting long term conditions than the national average.
2. Disabled residents are more likely to live in poverty and to suffer from social isolation.
3. Tower Hamlets has a young population, however 6.1% of the population are aged 65, of which we have the highest proportion of older residents living alone and an above average level of pensioner poverty.
4. The Council continues to provide a wide range of services to disabled and elderly residents and this administrations' commitment to free home care, makes Tower Hamlets the only council in the country to offer free home care.
5. Tower Hamlets has a thriving third sector, with between 2,000 and 3,000 organisations working in the borough. They provide a range of vital services, including delivery against our own Community Plan targets. The important role they play has been recognised by this administration who has increased investment in the Mainstream Grants to £8m.

This Council notes the following central government reforms:

1. The reduction in government support to older residents and disabled residents, including the change from RPI to CPI in pension uplift; the change in disability support from Disability Living Allowance onto Employment Support Allowance or Jobseekers Allowance and the transition from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payments, which will result in fewer residents receiving levels of support and those in receipt of benefits receiving less. This is in conjunction with rising food and energy bills which impact the hardest on those on fixed low incomes.
2. That the rhetoric of the Big Society which suggested an enhanced role for the third sector has been undermined by the funding cuts from central government have resulted in reduced ability for the third sector to provide services and have resulted in the third sector feeling marginalised and under-recognised.

This Council Notes the following resource implications:

1. The Council currently has a healthy level of reserves, expected to be £32,897,000 in March this year.

This Council Believes:

1. That the requirement to maintain a healthy level of reserves to meet current and future risks 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. To allocate the one-off funding in the following areas allocated from funding available from additional savings identified during the budget process and set out in the budget papers :

In relation to celebrating our older and disabled residents and the excellent work of our third sector:

Allocate £150k for 3 events to celebrate the achievements and contributions made by older residents in Tower Hamlets, disabled residents in Tower Hamlets and the third sector.

- A Disability Day to further promote disabled residents' dignity and wellbeing, which will be a celebration of disabled residents as well as provide information about support services and welfare advice.
- An Older People's Day to celebrate the contributions older residents have made and continue to make in the borough as well as an opportunity to provide information about support services, activity and leisure opportunities.
- A Third Sector Celebration to promote the excellent work and achievements of our third sector.

In relation to celebrating our heritage and history

Allocate a one-off sum of £4,000 to create a Tower Hamlets People's History Plaque Scheme.

- This will ensure we are able to commemorate our unique history and heritage.

In relation to helping our young people into the creative industries

Allocate £125k to create 10 part time apprenticeships in local creative industries.

- This will enable young people in Tower Hamlets to gain valuable experience in the huge range of cultural industries in the borough.