

Labour Group Budget Amendment

Proposer: Carlo Gibbs

Secunder: Sirajul Islam

Foreword:

- The ConDem Government continues in its ideological austerity drive hitting the most deprived communities such as ours the hardest. Whilst local councils face difficult decisions in the years ahead, strong, honest and fair leadership is required to ensure the most vulnerable are protected and services continue to serve residents' needs.
- The emptiness of this year's budget proposals from the Mayor shows that Lutfur Rahman has run out of ideas and has no plan to lead the borough through this difficult financial time.
- When John Biggs wins the Mayoralty in May we will be able to set about making the changes necessary to deliver the services residents rightly demand. Until then we need to send a clear message about the kind of administration we would lead.
- This Budget amendment starts to set out the progressive things that a Labour administration under John Biggs would seek to achieve. This includes;
 1. **Free School Meals for all primary school children;**
 2. **A 24h weekend noise nuisance and ASB reporting service;**
 3. **Action to tackle drug dealing;**
 4. **A private lettings service to cut out rip off charges and powers to hold RSLs to account;**
 5. **Utilising the council's capacity to build council housing;**
 6. **Funding to restore our much loved parks including bringing back the popular Victoria Park firework display.**
 7. **Cutting the Mayor's excessive spending on cars, advisors and communications;**

This Council believes:

- The budget deficit in 2015/16 stands at £28m and in 2016/17 this increases to £67m;
- The council budget for 2014/15 is not balanced and reserves are being used to cover the shortfall;
- The Mayor has failed to produce a plan of how he will tackle the deficit.
- Following years of pressure from Labour Group the Mayor has finally conceded that a plan is needed to deal with this deficit but has only just begun looking into this.
- This failure of leadership has led to two wasted years in which proposals could have been brought together in order to ensure our residents are protected from the worst of the Governments ideological cuts;
- The Mayor has left Tower Hamlets vulnerable because of this lack of leadership;

- The majority of the Mayors' current policies are not funded on a sustainable basis and are surviving on short term one off funding.
- It is important to show leadership in the face of ideological cuts driven by the Conservative / Liberal Democrat Coalition, and that as politicians we should be honest about the scale of the challenge we face and ensure that the council implements policies that are fair for its residents.

This Council therefore resolves to make the following amendments to the Mayor's budget for 2014/15:

Housing

1. Leaseholders and tenants

While the Mayor claims housing as one of his key priorities, he has failed to show leadership in an area of significant importance to residents. His failures include:

- Failing to get a grip on rising leaseholder charges and provide transparency for what residents are being charged for;
- Failing to take leadership over housing in the borough, instead meddling in the affairs of Tower Hamlets Homes board by hijacking the nominations and allowing the Chair to be forced out by independent representatives;
- Failing to implement all of the recommendations from the Beavers and Struthers Leaseholder audit;
- Failing to build council housing - disgracefully only building 15 council homes in his three and half years in office;
- Presiding over the Watts Grove site fiasco;
- Failing to get a fair deal from the Olympic village, securing just 27 homes;
- Failing to crack down on rogue landlords and failing to support people in the private rented sector;
- Hypocritically allowing his Cabinet to brand Registered Social Landlords "dodgy" despite them delivering 99% of affordable housing in the borough, for which he takes credit;
- Failing to hold RSLs to account when they don't deliver for their residents on issues such as anti-social behaviour;
- Overseeing a 109% increase in homelessness;
- Unlawfully leaving 94 families in bed and breakfast accommodation for over 6 weeks;

This Council resolves to reverse this legacy of failure by:

- We will, following the election, begin looking at bringing Tower Hamlets Home back under council control to provide stronger leadership and investigating the potential for savings from this process;
- Providing the support and leadership required to allow the council to deliver an ambitious council house building programme as the Labour Party has done in other areas such as Southwark, by preparing to deliver 1000 new homes;

- Providing funding to establish a council run lettings agency to support residents into the private rented sector that are facing high rents, charges and excessive credit checks and bring forward proposals around to crack down on rogue private landlords;
- Implementing the final recommendations in the Scrutiny review into co-regulation and accountability to ensure that Registered Housing Providers are delivering for residents;

This will allow a Labour Mayor to show much needed leadership by:

- Reviewing the Service Level Agreements between the council and THH with a view to providing better value for money;
- Reviewing costs to service charges with a view to providing a more efficient and transparent service for THH leaseholders and residents;
- Immediately implementing all of the recommendations in the Beavers and Struthers audit.
- Building the council homes that are so desperately needed;
- Support residents who are victims of rogue landlords or struggling to find housing in the private rented sector;
- Hold Registered Social Landlords to account and ensure they are deliver a decent standard of services for our residents;

This council further believes:

2. Tackling poverty

- Despite the political will and the financial capability, the Mayor has failed to show the leadership that is needed in order to deliver free school meals for all primary school pupils in Tower Hamlets. This lack of leadership and disingenuous attempt to convince residents he has already delivered this fails our young people and their parents.
- That the mayor disgracefully cut funding to advice centres at the height of the welfare cuts and proposed closing the one stop shop at Rushmead. That only through Labour Group's campaigning were the worst of these cuts reversed.
- The Conservative/Liberal Democrat Government have further cut the funding for crises payments, leaving the council £1.7m down in funding.
- Typically, the Mayor has no idea how to implement a policy to replace this scheme and has simply used reserves to cover the shortfall for one year

This Council resolves to show leadership by diverting resources back to free school meals in order to deliver this for all primary school pupils as the Labour Party has done in Newham, Southwark and Islington. This will include:

- Reversing the Mayor's decision to remove £1.3m of funding for free school meals from public health funds;
- Showing leadership by ensuring that the power of the Mayor's office is used to work with business, third sector and NHS partners to ensure that more than 100 women over 25 are given opportunities for employment in the health sector in a sustainable way and not just as a one off.
- Ensuring that through the main stream grants programme organisations that provide welfare advice are given priority and that Lutfur Rahman's disgraceful politicisation of the grants process is ended.

This Council further believes:

3. Crime and safety

Under Lutfur Rahman crime in Tower Hamlets has risen while it is falling in neighbouring boroughs. The Mayor has failed to show leadership on this issue and this failure includes:

- Restricting the operating times for the out of hours noise service, restricting residents ability to raise noise complaints at key times;
- Presiding over an increase in crime of 1.4% since he came to power, while neighbouring Labour boroughs have seen significant falls of up to 8%;
- Drug dealing remains a major issue on the borough's streets and estates;
- Failing to challenge the Conservative Mayor of London's cuts to police numbers and police stations;

In order to address these important issues, this Council resolves to:

- Develop capacity to implement a community safety plan for each neighbourhood to ensure local residents have their say on local priorities;
- Provide additional resources to officers to tackle the scourge of drug dealing that blights many parts of the borough, including fully funding the sniffer dogs patrols to be rolled out across the borough;
- Reverse the cuts to the out of hours noise team to ensure that all noise nuisance and ASB can be reported around the clock at the weekends.

This Council further believes:

4. Communications and good governance

The communications budget and other resources at this council has been wilfully abused by the Mayor, and at a time that council services are being cut and staffing levels reduced, it is disgraceful that council funds are being used to promote the Mayor to support his re-election.

Examples of this unfair excess include:

- £1m per year on a newspaper which favours the Mayor and independent councillors and which the Council's own statistics have shown featured 320 quotes from the Mayor and independent councillors compared with only 15 from Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Respect councillors combined. The paper also ran 164 images of the Mayor and his supporters as opposed to the 26 featuring opposition councillors including the ceremonial speaker of the Council;
- £16,000 spent on propaganda telling residents the streets are 'clean';
- £37,000 spent on letters announcing policy decisions;
- Last year choosing to increase spending on his office by 65% to £700,000, including £296k for advisors whilst cutting frontline staffing budgets elsewhere in the Council.
- Spent £42k on a mayoral Limousine and personal chauffeur and dishonestly claimed that this was being scrapped, when funding continues to remain in the MTFP for 3 years;

- £170,000 Spent on community forums where just a handful of residents attended. Whilst we fully support deliberative democracy this should be done in a truly engaging way and thus we would review this programme and look to work in partnership with resident organisations and others.

In order to address this abuse of public funds this Council resolves to:

- To remove the capacity for departments to spend on advertising by reducing their budgets by £200,000;
- Cut funding to the Chief Executive's department by £326,000 to remove the advisors and the Mayoral Car;

This council further believes:

5. Community and Public Realm

That the Mayor has failed to ensure that the borough is clean and that the community benefit from commercial events in the boroughs parks. Including;

- Nearly 4,000 missed collections in three months;
- Charging for bulk waste collections and having one of the worst record in the country for infestations;
- A dog fouling machine costing over £41,000 a year that services only a small part of the Deputy Mayor's ward, cleaning the street he lives on twice a week;
- The removal of one of London's favourite fireworks displays from Victoria Park for no good reason;
- Refusing to listen to residents concerns over the commercial use of Victoria Park and other parks;
- The decision to move the council Town Hall to Mulberry Place was made by the Lib Dems in 1993, and not under Labour as the Mayor is dishonestly trying to claim;
- That the options for a new town hall have not be properly scrutinised or explored by the Mayor;

This council resolves:

- To redeploy the Dog Fouling machine to work for residents across the borough;
- To return the annual fireworks event to its home at Victoria Park;
- Allocate £125,000 to support the restoration and improvement of the borough's other parks and open spaces;
- To delay the decision to build a multimillion pound town hall. Moving allocated funding back to a reserve fund for decision after a thorough review of options.

2014/15 Budget Proposals

Project	Change
Saving Proposals	
Cancel the decision to remove £1.3m of funding for free school meals for 2014/15	£1,300,000
Departmental top slice for advertising CLC, D&R, ESWB	£200,000
Cut the Mayoral car	£30,000
Cut the Chief Executives cost for mayoral advisors/consultants	£296,000

Remove community ward forum funding following completion of 2013/14 programme pending review	£170,000
Savings from the reduction to 45 councillors	£28,000
Delay decision on Town Hall pending options review	£2,000,000
	+ £4,024,000
Spending Proposals	
Provide universal free school meals for all primary pupils	- £1,300,000
Provide funding to develop a council run lettings agency to support people into the private rented sector	- £250,000
Restoration of Victoria Park firework display	- £45,000
Build capacity for council house building programme	£0 – From existing budget
Restoration of 24 hours noise service at weekends	-£110,000
Neighbourhood community safety plan (from existing resources)	£0 – From existing budget
Expansion of sniffer dog patrols to tackle drug dealing	-£144,000
Deliver the final recommendations from RSL co-regulation scrutiny review specifically in relation to the tenants' panel.	-£50,000
Public realm and park improvements	- £125,000
Move funding allocated for Town Hall to separate earmarked reserve	-£2,000,000
Total:	-£4,024,000