

## **A COVID-19 Economic and Community Recovery Budget Amendment**

**Proposed: Cllr Rabina Khan**

**Seconded: Cllr Andrew Wood**

The Council Notes:

The Impact of COVID-19 on Tower Hamlets Communities and Economy

1. Covid-19 has caused a health and economic crisis across the UK, but Tower Hamlets residents in particular have been disproportionately affected. It is our duty as elected councillors to support all of our residents and ensure that no one is forgotten or suffers unnecessarily.
2. Covid has had a hugely detrimental impact on communities, local businesses and the larger economy as well as individuals, and has laid bare existing inequalities. Although the furlough scheme helped to protect jobs, the most recent unemployment rates from the ONS still show that the unemployment rate is the highest figure for five years (1.74 million people nationwide).
3. The pandemic has placed immense pressure on vital services such as mental health and social care, and that homelessness, unemployment, domestic abuse, financial hardship and poverty has increased.
4. The budget amendment seeks to protect vital lifeline services communities and invest into a Covid economic recovery plan for the future.

The Council Notes:

Labour's Budget Cuts to People and Communities

The Labour Mayor John Biggs' budget outlines serious cuts to people at a time of extra need.

1. Ideas Stores and Libraries SAV / RES 003/21-22: Existing £1m saving and new £600k saving, including the closure of Cubitt Town Library and a reduction of hours at Bethnal Green and Bow Libraries.
2. Substance Misuse Service reductions SAV / HAC 008 / 21-22: £450k reduction in services and ending the Community Alcohol Project.
3. Homelessness Reduction Service; and Health E1 Homelessness Drug and Alcohol Service: Of £102k, with service to close.
4. Adults Transport Savings SAV / HAC 002 / 21-22: £200k; a change to how the service is provided and a reduction of activity linked to day centre changes.
5. Day Opportunities - day centres redesign SAV / HAC 003 / 21-22 (£568k closure of two centres and redesign of service)
6. Adult healthy lives' services locality-based model SAV / HAC 010 / 21-22: £142k end of service.
7. Young People's Wellbeing Service – recommissioning savings SAV / HAC 012 / 21-22: £70k (£18k in 20221-22 and a further £52k in 2022-23 for full year effect).
8. Decommission the Royal London Hospital Violence Reduction Project Health, Adults & Community SAV / HAC 007 / 21-22:(£102k decommissioning of this project.

The Labour administration will make a total saving proposal: £3.234m from cutting vital services to children, families, older people, disabled people and people struggling with drug and alcohol problems.

The Council Notes:

1. That the Mayor has proposed an increase of Council Tax by 4.99%, which is 0.1% behind 5%, but failed to keep the borough clean during the pandemic.
2. The Mayor's previous budget savings proposals, including cuts to community services, have failed to deliver the savings envisaged.
3. That the Council has now appointed three Accountants to help with closing the council's accounts.
4. That the Council is forecasting an end to New Homes Bonus funding from 2023/24. It would be reasonable to question, therefore, the estimated £3.8 million in 2022/23, and nothing in 2023/24. This would appear to set the benchmark for additional cuts to essential frontline services between 2022-2024.
5. Reserves are forecast to be £134.7m, the General Fund balance £20m, CIL £64.7m and s106 £105.2m, all forecast balances as at 31/3/21.
6. Liberal Democrat Councillor Rabina Khan has been calling for a life science research centre in Tower Hamlets to replace the European Medicine Agency and a bid for City Status, given that the Queen's Platinum Jubilee will be in 2021. With the new location of the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development in the borough this shows that there is interest for investment in the area generating income. The increase in footfall from the staff employed there will be good for local businesses.
7. The Government announced on Friday 19 Feb 2021 that the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) will be led by scientists who will have the freedom to identify and fund transformational science and technology at speed.
8. Liberal Democrat Councillor Rabina Khan has called for Tower Hamlets to put in a bid for City Status for 2021 and work towards for Royal Borough Status in advance of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and would provide a new era for Tower Hamlets in a post Brexit and COVID-19 era.

Tower Hamlets Reserve, Generated Income, and Incoming Funds

This Council welcomes:

1. Tower Hamlets Council received the Government's Covid-19 Grant Aid to the borough amounting as follows:
  - a. Tower Hamlets has spent £55 million of the £63 million allocated Covid-19 Grant Aid to the borough.
  - b. Tower Hamlets has an estimated surplus of £7.5 million of unspent aid by the end of this financial year.

- c. Tower Hamlets Council is set to receive a further £13 million of COVID-19 grant next financial year from the Government.

This Council amends the Mayor's budget as follows:

1. Putting Emotional Well-Being at the heart of Tower Hamlets Communities
  - Delete the proposed savings of £568k from the re-provision of the existing day centres (SAV / HAC 003 / 21-22), including continuing to deliver services at Riverside, Stepney Way and Pritchard's Road
  - Delete the Review Telecare model saving of £142k (SAV / HAC 014/21-22)
  - Delete the proposed end of the Health E1 Drug and Alcohol Service saving of £102k (SAV / HAC 015/21-22)
  - Delete the proposed £650k savings for the Support for Learning Service to prevent the loss of crucial teaching staff and reduce the disruption to SEND children, whose learning has already been severely disrupted by the pandemic.
  - Establish a specific council Foodbank grant of up to £200k for charities and voluntary agencies operating foodbanks in Tower Hamlets to ensure, as far as possible, that no one goes hungry in the East End over the next two years. This will give people a reasonable amount of time to try and rebuild their lives.
  - Develop a Digital Inclusion grant of £100k for schools and families to access online learning effectively. The pandemic laid bare that many children were without laptops and the inability to access on learning.
  - Adults Transport Savings (SAV / HAC 002 / 21-22) states that: "It is not clear what savings have been identified as part of this work and which are apportioned to Health, Adults and Communities. Further work will need to be done to ascertain the corporate savings." This uncertainty is not helpful for people who rely on this transport.
  - Protect Adult healthy lives' services locality-based model SAV / HAC 010 / 21-22
  - Protect Young People's Wellbeing Service SAV / HAC 012 / 21-22.
  - Delete the proposed savings for decommissioning of the Royal London Hospital Violence Reduction Project Health, Adults & Community SAV / HAC 007 / 21-22.
  - Delete the proposal to make savings from Ideas Stores and Libraries SAV / RES 003/21-22: Existing £1m saving and new £600k saving, including the closure of Cubitt Town Library and a reduction of hours at Bethnal Green and Bow Libraries.

The budget gap caused by deleting the above savings could be covered from the promised £13 million un-ringfenced Covid grant due next year. This will protect services for the next 3 years whilst a Covid economic recovery plan is actioned to generate income for the borough.

2. Investing in Re-building a Stronger, Sustainable, and Greener Tower Hamlets Economy

- That a Tower Hamlets cross-party working group lobbies the Government to locate the ARIA Agency within Tower Hamlets and work towards a bid for City Status for the borough
- With plans for the European Reconstruction and Development Bank to be located in Tower Hamlets in 2022, together with the possibility of ARIA also being situated in the borough, and with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee to be celebrated in 2022, Tower Hamlets is in a unique position to bid for City Status and work towards Royal Borough Status. The funding for this piece of work should be 75K as part of an investment to generate a stronger economy programme
- Tower Hamlets seeks to build stronger partnerships with Barts NHS and Queen Mary University as part of part of a greener environment. Health and educational institutions are the ideal partnerships to promote and accelerate a more sustainable environment that will benefit everyone, having a positive impact on both mental and physical wellbeing. 25k to be allocated for development work.
- Three million people were unable to access the Government's scheme for self-employed people due to the restrictions – To increase £200k to the Resident Support Scheme to support self-employed people unable to access support.

### 3. Housing & Standing up for Leaseholders Trapped by the Cladding Crisis

1. The Council should set up an online forum where they can share protocols openly with leaseholders and keep them updated on funding and remediation progress, something that hasn't yet happened. Council assets should be maximised for housing and community land trusts through a Tower Hamlets Housing Cooperation. An allocation of 100k should be set aside for a team to work with leaseholders affected by the cladding scandal, which can be funded from NHB Funds.
2. An increase of additional planning officers is vital to safeguard CIL monies – 70k planning officers.
3. The Council should investigate how the council's pension fund can be used to invest into building homes in the borough. Other councils have used money from their pension funds to build new homes. Islington Council, for example, is using £150m from its pension fund to build hundreds of new social housing.
4. A Tower Hamlets Housing Cooperation will be committed to building and developing council-owned homes on council-owned land. The first programme of assets that can be developed to build council homes are as follows:
  - Southern Grove
  - Albert Jacob House
  - Commercial Road Car Pound
  - Jack Dash House

The above council-owned assets are no longer needed for funding of the Civic Centre development. The use of RTB receipts with additional borrowing can deliver up to up to 1,000 homes across the four sites.

## A Safer Tower Hamlets

- As we prepare for lifting lockdown the borough must invest in keeping our borough safe from drugs, crime and violent crime.
- Delete the proposed savings for VAWG, Hate Crime and Community Safety (SAV / HAC 005/21-22) so that there is no reduction in the quality of services available to victims of these crimes
- Reverse the decision to decommission the Community Safety Response Team (SAV / HAC 006/21-22) and reinstate the budget of £512k for this service annually
- Delete the £450k Substance Misuse Service (SAV/HAC 008/21-22)
- Delete the proposed savings for decommissioning of the Royal London Hospital Violence Reduction Project Health, Adults & Community SAV / HAC 007 / 21-22.

The budget gap caused by deleting the above savings could be covered from the promised £13 million un-ringfenced Covid grant due next year. This will protect services for the next 3 years whilst a Covid economic recovery plan is actioned to generate income for the borough.

## Engaging All Communities in Addressing Air Pollution and Climate Change

- Expand the provision of live air quality monitor sensors across the borough, as the four sensors we have are not in places where people live, work or study, but either in parks or right next to main roads. The Council's own Love Your Neighbourhood app routinely shows air quality in the borough as being low (low meaning low levels of pollutants)
- Ensure that pink recycling bags are consistently delivered to homes, especially to people and families living in cramped conditions in high tower blocks, older and disabled residents and those unable to access pink bags. To work with schools where pink bags can be accessed by local families.
- Tower Hamlets Council recognises that in the UK and elsewhere, climate activism, planning and engagement has often failed to include poorer and BAME communities and people with access and mobility requirements, who may face the worst impacts of both environmental damage and measures imposed to curb climate change
- Therefore, it is imperative that any public engagement activity should include empowering these communities to play a central role in agreeing the changes needed to tackle the climate crisis, particularly locally.
- Deliver a programme of community climate change engagement to build awareness, support and empower BAME Groups to engage with the projects around climate change. Such examples could be through an Interfaith Calendar, a Ramadan Calendar, links to how fasting relates to the concept of remembering not to waste, and Parental Engagement Projects within schools through Parents Matter.
- To ensure LTNs are delivered in the borough through mitigating equality risks.

The above work to address Air Pollution and Climate Change can be delivered through funding Section 106 funds that relate to the Green Environment. Funding of £100k must be allocated in the first year.