

Labour Group motion – Budget Full Council

Proposer: Mayor John Biggs

Seconder: Cllr Candida Ronald

1. This year's budget has been particularly challenging . A decade of austerity, increasing demand and the coronavirus pandemic have hit our council hard and made balancing the books ever more difficult.
2. However, despite Covid-19 and the significant uncertainty about our future funding position, the draft Budget protects frontline services and prioritises those in the greatest need including:
 - **£3m to fund Free School Meals for all primary school children**, one of only a small number of councils in the country to do this.
 - Additional funding for **police officers** and our council operated **ASB service**.
 - Our **Tackling Poverty Fund** providing financial support and advice for our most vulnerable residents.
 - Capital funding for hundreds of **new council homes** and **three new secondary schools**.
 - Protection for all of our **Children's Centres, the Brady and Kobi Nazrul centre**.
 - A **100% council tax discount for the poorest in our community**, one of the only places in the UK to offer this.
 - The **Local Community Fund** and **Small Grants fund** as well as the continuing range of welfare rights services we fund, Linkage Plus services, carers emergency service and carers respite services.
 - In addition to these highlights we will maintain a high level of universal services and local presence across our borough.

This Council believes:

1. Covid19 has been a catastrophic event in the life of Tower Hamlets communities, and while much of the support people will need must come from Government, we should look at what we can do to help restore local well-being, and that we should also look to learn from our Covid-19 experiences how to create a more caring and people-centred approach to providing services and supporting people in our community. With the right focus this can be transformational.
2. The flexibility created by increased New Homes Bonus income, plus some possible use of additional Covid-19 funds, means we can make additional one-off investment to fund an ambitious package of support to kickstart our community's Covid-19 recovery, despite the challenges ahead and the need to resolve the problem of overspending and unfunded growth in our core budgets, requiring us to continue with a programme of savings.
3. The financial outlook facing the council continues to be extremely uncertain with significant risks ahead including the economic impact of Covid-19, business rates and council tax income reductions, undelivered savings, the business rates reset, New Homes Bonus reform,

the Fair Funding Review and 'levelling up' agenda. Much of this not currently reflected in the MTFS.

This Council Resolves:

1. That plans are drawn up to establish a Covid-19 Recovery Fund, initially of £3m, to provide funding to kickstart our community's recovery from the pandemic over the next 12-24 months and help to ensure we build a brighter post-pandemic future for our borough, for example including:
 - Targeted funding for initiatives to support people back into work or training.
 - Health initiatives to build on the increased public awareness of healthy living
 - A new grants fund for community organisation led projects to help revitalise and build community cohesion as we emerge from lockdown.
 - Continued additional support for foodbanks during the recovery phase of the pandemic.
 - Top-up funding for our Resident Support Scheme and Tackling Poverty work.
 - Additional commissioning from the new adult day centre hub focused on projects for older and vulnerable residents to break down isolation and tackle loneliness which has increased over the pandemic.
 - Support, alongside Government funded measures, to mitigate the educational impact of school closures.
 - Covid-19 recovery sport and activities for families and young people over the summer.
2. Having listened to the public consultation we note the Cabinet's decision to retain a five day service at Bethnal Green Library, Cubitt Town Library and Watney Market Idea Store including Saturdays, significantly increasing the proposed opening times and allowing residents more flexibility around when they visit their local library once they are able to open again.