

## **Foreword from Mayor John Biggs on the 2022-23 Budget and MTFs**

This is an ambitious budget that invests in residents' priorities as we focus on recovering from the pandemic.

It protects services, supports our most vulnerable, helps residents with the increased cost of living and invests to unlock opportunity for all.

After nearly 2 years of disruption to our lives due to Covid-19 we remain focussed on beating this virus and ensuring our borough recovers. Our whole community has supported each other during this time and it's highlighted the importance of having well-funded public services and building resilience so we can support our residents when times are tough.

As a council we have continued to work with our partners in the NHS in the rollout of the vaccine. We set up a dedicated helpline for residents as well as providing testing facilities and distributing thousands of food parcels and items of PPE (personal protective equipment). We have distributed vital financial support to our businesses to help keep them afloat at a really difficult time. We have also worked with our partner organisations and volunteers across our community to tackle the virus and the impact it's had on our borough.

The council has had to adapt as we've moved in and out of different restrictions and I'm proud that we have continued to deliver key services throughout. It's not been easy, especially when we have had reduced staff levels because of sickness and self-isolation.

Due to austerity and increased demand for our services, we'd already been transforming how we deliver services for residents and we have had to continue to adapt due to the pandemic.

Our budget consultation saw around 1,900 people share their views on what the council should prioritise. Almost half say that community safety should be the top priority for the council. Children's Services, street cleaning and waste also come out as top priorities.

We have listened to this feedback. This budget protects our investment in council funded police officers and our CCTV upgrade. It also invests additional money into our waste and recycling service. It protects council-funded Free School Meals which means 19,000 children get a meal. This equates to an estimated saving of £450 per child for families which is a real lifeline.



I'm proud that this budget proposes **no new cuts to services**. We've faced over a decade of austerity from the government during which time we've had to save over £200m due to cuts to our funding and increased demands for services.

This budget will:

- **Make our borough cleaner by investing in more waste and recycling collections and additional street cleansing.**
- **Make our borough safer by protecting our investment in council funded police officers and CCTV.**
- **Give our young people the best start in life by protecting our investment in Free School Meals and our Children's Centres.**
- **Tackle the housing crisis by delivering new council homes at genuinely affordable rents.**
- **Make our borough fairer by protecting residents on low incomes through our 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme.**
- **Tackle the climate emergency by investing to make us a carbon neutral council by 2025 and deliver school and play streets.**
- **Extend opportunity to all by investing to tackle digital inclusion.**
- **Invest in good services for all, including our Idea Stores and libraries, and our award-winning parks.**

Residents are facing massive uncertainty and pressures on their household budgets. We recognise this and that is why we are proposing to freeze our portion of council tax this year to give respite at a time when energy and food prices are rising and the impact of the cut to Universal Credit is being felt. We are however proposing a 1% increase to the Adult Social Care precept in order to fund vital social care services. The government expects us to make this increase to pay for the care costs of our most vulnerable residents.

We continue to have one of the lowest council taxes in London. As well as freezing our portion of council tax we are one of the few councils to continue to offer up to a 100% discount on council tax bills through our Council Tax Reduction Scheme. It is a lifeline for residents struggling to make ends meet and means residents on low incomes get money back in their pockets at a time when many peoples' incomes have been hit by the impact of Covid.

The Government has only given us a one-year funding settlement and we await further details of what their 'Levelling Up' agenda will mean for councils like ours. This uncertainty makes it hard to plan and so we are proposing a one-year budget



this year, and we hope that the Government will give us more certainty and not reduce our funding when we have already had to make many tough decisions due to austerity. That is why we will continue to plan for the future which means not easing up on continuing to transform our services to make them more efficient.

This budget protects the universal services our residents rely on and maintains our support for those facing hardship. I'm proud that we are continuing to invest to make Tower Hamlets a cleaner, safer and fairer place and to unlock opportunity for all.

**Mayor John Biggs**  
Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets

