



Full Council – 11 July 2022

Amendment submitted by the Liberal Democrats Group to the Motion for the Non Cabinet Member debate

Proposed amendment – To add the wording underlined

Leaving No One Behind: Declaring a Cost-of-Living Emergency

This Council notes:

That Brent and its residents are struggling due to the cost-of-living crisis. For many residents this will have been the most difficult decade they have ever experienced.

In April 2022, the Government increased National Insurance by 1.25%; this is projected to cost the average Brent resident an additional £295 per year.

On 1 April 2022 Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54 per cent, with the average standard tariff energy bill set to increase by up to £693 per year.

Inflation is now confirmed at 9% with the fastest rate of increase for 40 years. Inflation has been higher in London than the national average.

In the meantime, at least 25% of the people who work in Brent earn less than the real Living Wage for London.

The LGA estimates that without adequate long-term funding the collective increase in inflationary costs faced by English councils this year will be £2.4bn, growing to £3bn in 2023-24 and £3.6bn in 2024-25.

Local councils up and down the country are the last line of defence in supporting residents during the cost of living crisis.

Figures show that over 5,000 residents presented at Brent Hubs in need of food aid between April 2019 to January 2022.

Between December 2020 and March 2022, the Council distributed £5.5m through grants to Brent residents, supporting the families of approximately 12,000 eligible children and young people with supermarket vouchers during each of the school holidays.

The Brent Resident Support Fund (RSF), has been in place since August 2020: it has supported 2,658 applicants with a total of £5.2 million in cash grants.

This Council believes:

Many of the services we all rely on are in a state of managed decline, starved of sustainable funding.

Inflation is not going to come down overnight and the impact on our local services could be disastrous. In Brent, our council has already cut nearly £200m from our budget, severely curtailing the services offered to residents.

In our local NHS Trust there are over 50k residents on the waiting list for care.

Residents are seeing tax hikes, energy bills soaring and petrol and food prices rising drastically.

Beneath the cost of living crisis, there is a mounting mental health crisis and a housing crisis that never went away.

The average home in Brent costs more than 16 times the average annual salary in the area, 9 times above the English average.

Given the seriousness of the situation this council believes it should speak with one voice to those in power and raise the alarm on behalf of residents across each and every one of our 22 wards and declare a “Cost of Living Emergency”.

This Council therefore resolves:

To declare a “Cost of Living Emergency”.

As part of this, to call on the Government to take the following practical steps in order to help our resident’s incomes stretch further.

- To stabilise the foundations of our economy by providing emergency support for business, reducing their costs and limiting the price rises they pass on to consumers.
- To reverse the planned increases to National Insurance, protect our residents by reducing the burden of VAT on everyday goods; and increase welfare support in-line with the rate of inflation.
- To immediately use revenue from a windfall tax on oil and gas producers to help Brent families with their energy bills.
- To provide security for the winter and beyond by providing the financial support necessary to retrofit and insulate homes, while looking to the future with commitments to utilise more renewable sources of energy in the National Grid.

- To put in place a longer-term approach to economic growth and security, underpinned by an industrial strategy.

To add:

- To reinstate the upgrading of the Personal Tax Allowance and the basic rate tax band with inflation to avoid lower paid people falling into the tax net.
- To reinstate the £20 pw Universal Credit payment to those on low incomes.
- To introduce a Windfall Tax on Supermarkets making exceptional profits as a result of rising prices.
- To resolve the issue of Fair Funding for London Transport to avoid further cuts in public transport and above inflation rises in fares.

To conduct a full review into what the council can offer Brent families struggling with the cost of living emergency and ensure that the voice of local people is at the centre of its response.

To add:

As part of the Review into what the Council can do specifically:

- To consider the use of Reserves (such as the £5.2 million no longer required for meeting past London wide Pension liabilities) to mitigate a 2023/24 Council Tax Rise.
- To look at all Council Charges such Parking Permits, Toobig for the bin, Green bin collections and others with a view to reducing any which are generating income beyond the economic cost of providing the service.
- To provide additional resources to those Advice agencies which provide direct advice and support to residents in managing their debts, which assist residents in claiming additional benefits such as pension Credit and those which advise on how to reduce the use of their cars through more walking, cycling and use of public transport and reduce their domestic energy costs by switching of unnecessary appliances and gadgets.

Finally:

The Council also agrees to suspend free parking for Councillors (except those registered as disabled) using the Civic Centre Car Park and allocates all additional income generated from freeing up paid for parking spaces to a fund to assist local residents in most need.