

NICKIE AIKEN MP
CITIES OF LONDON AND WESTMINSTER



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cllr Adam Hug
Leader, Westminster City Council
Westminster City Hall
64 Victoria Street
London
SW1E 6QP

10th March 2023

Dear Adam,

2023 Westminster City Council Budget

Since its publication, constituents have raised with me their deep concerns regarding Westminster City Council's Budget, particularly your decision to increase member allowances and social housing rents.

Upon studying your Budget proposals, I was particularly alarmed to read that you have chosen to increase the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) by up to 45%.

I note that all members of the Conservative group voted against the increased remuneration proposals, and I understand that individual Conservative Councillors benefitting from these proposals have already pledged to donate any remuneration over 4% to local charities, who are helping to support our local community.

We are in a global cost of living crisis; rather than increasing senior councillors' remuneration, the council's budget would be better spent supporting residents, including by putting money towards lowering rent for council tenants. Labour's decision to increase rents for council housing in this Budget was disappointing, but raising their rent by the maximum of 7% was outrageous.

This is a case of double standards and hypocrisy. I would be interested to hear how you justify asking social tenants to pay for these added costs, while you are significantly increasing the pay of your colleagues.

As a former Leader of Westminster Council, I know that difficult decisions need to be made. However, considering Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan is once again increasing Londoners' bills by 9%, I was dismayed that this Labour council is also adding to household bills, at a time when food and energy costs have also increased.

I also find it astonishing that in less than a year Labour has broken a key manifesto pledge to freeze Council Tax until 2024. This is clearly not the case as you are raising it by 2% with the Adult Social Care precept. I recall the Westminster Labour group consistently voting against such rises in previous years. Raising Council Tax by 2% is not a freeze.

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Turning to housing. The creation of more affordable housing was an absolute priority for the previous Conservative administration - and rightly so. I was proud to have begun the largest council house building programme for a generation which included an emphasis on more key worker homes and continued by my Conservative successor. It was also a Labour manifesto commitment. Yet, already across the Ebury, Western Gate, Luton Street, Ashford, Luxborough, Carlton Dean and Torridon schemes some 200 key worker homes have been slashed back to 49.

These were homes designed for our nurses, teachers, fire workers, police officers and young people. Affordable housing should be a priority for the capital budget and its distinct absence is now noted under the Labour administration. The Labour council is sending a clear message that key workers will not be supported in Westminster.

Speaking more broadly, when I was Leader I was proud of having the lowest council tax in the country while maintaining high-quality services. Residents deserve quick housing repairs, clean streets, targeted support for the most vulnerable as well as sensible and pragmatic efficiencies to keep costs low and standards high.

Of late, standards have been slipping. Constituents often tell me how services under the Labour council are worsening. As it stands, I struggle to see how this Budget will help deliver improvements for residents. At Labour's first opportunity, you have placed increased costs of your administration onto residents - and in a cost of living crisis.

We both know that there are fairer, more equitable ways to present a Budget. What you have presented is as a whole neither fair nor equitable. As such, I will be making the contents of this letter public. I urge you to look again at your priorities and in particular stop the 45% increase in councillor allowances.

Yours,



Nickie Aiken MP

Cities of London and Westminster