



Council

Motions

Date: 23 November 2022

Key decision: No

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: n/a

Contributors: Chief Executive (Head of Governance and Committee Services)

Outline and recommendation

To receive motions from Members of the Council.

Motion 1 – Cost of Living Emergency

Proposer: Cllr de Ryk

Secunder: Cllr Olaru

This Council notes that:

Lewisham families and households are struggling to make ends meet and are facing a cost of living emergency.

61,000 people in Lewisham are estimated falling behind with their bills and approximately 40% of households are living in fuel poverty.

Martin Lewis, founder of [MoneySavingExpert.com](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com), has said families are facing a 'cataclysmic' crisis this winter. Anecdotally, residents are asking to have their gas disconnected, so they are not tempted to turn on the the heating.

Despite the Government's claims, energy bills are not capped at £2,500 and many households will end up spending much more, with those on pre-payment meters paying more for their energy than those who pay by other methods.

In England, there are 400,000 households that rely on communal heating systems, with over half of these residing in social housing. These households are not protected by the energy cap and face additional increases of £1,130 per year.

Inner London private sector rents have risen by 19% over the past 12 months. The Council has had residents living in the private rented sector seeking support after receiving rent increases of 30%. The Council's spending on temporary accommodation is estimated to increase to £48m by 2023, up from £32m in 2019.

Food poverty is also rising. In the past year food prices have increased by 14.5% and food bank referrals from Citizens Advice Lewisham have doubled from 7,500 in 2021 to 15,000 in 2022.

Since the pandemic Lewisham Council has supported families and residents by:

- Providing £3.1m in council tax support to over 21,000 households
- Distributing £2.67m in food and fuel vouchers
- Awarding £1.6m to almost 700 families to help them cover rent payments and secure somewhere to live
- Making free school meals available in the school holidays to over 11,000 children
- Donating £126,000 to local foodbanks to help meet their demand
- Giving around 3,000 laptops to school children to help them with their studies
- Delivering over 1,200 new social homes between May 2018 and March 2022, providing Lewisham families with a safe, secure and affordable social home
- Leading the South London Energy Efficiency Partnership which has supported more than 5,000 vulnerable and low-income households to reduce their energy costs
- Created the £750,000 Lewisham Works in Lewisham Shopping centre that will work with local businesses to provide skills and employment training to 500 local people
- Launched the £500,000 Lewisham Creative Futures project to support residents, focussed on people with learning disabilities, to work in the digital and creative industries
- Supported 20,855 families with children and 8,832 elderly households with grants from the Household Support Fund to help with food and utility bills
- Reinvested £40m into our local economy through community wealth building policies, helping create well-paid, local jobs for local families

This Council believes:

1. Only the Government has the power to end this cost of living emergency, therefore the Government should tackle the cost of living crisis immediately.
2. The Government should fund councils to provide free school meals during school holidays and ensure all children in low-income households should be eligible to receive them.
3. The Government should provide protections for those in the private rented sector to shield residents from extortionate rent increases.
4. The Government should increase benefits in line with inflation. A change in Government policy to only increase benefits by wage growth would mean a working single parent with one child would lose £478 this year.
5. The Government should tackle low pay. Around 10,000 workers in Lewisham earn less than the real Living Wage.
6. The Government should ensure everyone pays the same for their energy costs and standing charges, regardless of if they are on a pre-payment meter or pay via direct debit.
7. The Government should adopt Labour's plan to tackle the Conservatives' cost of living crisis by:
 - Freezing energy bills this winter, funded by an expanded windfall tax on excess oil and gas giants
 - Insulating millions of homes, saving on energy bills now and in the longer term
 - Cutting small business rates and support businesses
 - Buying, making and selling more in Britain to create well-paid, secure jobs in every community

This Council resolves to:

1. Declare a 'Cost of Living Emergency' and support residents through the current crisis
2. Recognise the role it is playing to support residents by:
 - Launching the Warm Welcome programme across the borough. Twelve warm spaces have opened, run by the council in libraries and council buildings, so people can stay warm during the day and access -financial advice and our jobs and skills programmes
 - Working with the community, Lewisham Mayoresses and local food banks through the Lewisham Food Action Plan to address food insecurity
 - Working with the Citizens Advice Bureau, Lewisham Local, Age UK Southwark & Lewisham, and other organisations within the voluntary and community sector to ensure residents receive the support and financial advice they need
 - Continuing our award-winning apprenticeship programme and jobs and skills service to support Lewisham residents into good jobs
 - Building on Lewisham Council's status as a Living Wage Council to become a Living Wage Place to create more well-paid local jobs for local people
 - Exploring trialling a fair finance scheme with Lewisham Credit Union that will assist residents with managing their finances

Motion 2 – Net Zero

Proposer: Cllr James Royston

Seconder: Cllr Liam Curran

Humans have already caused irreversible climate change, the impacts of which are being felt in the UK and around the world. The global temperature has already increased by 1.2°C above pre-industrial levels, and the natural world has reached crisis point, with 28% of plants and animals threatened with extinction.

Unless we drastically change course, the world is set to exceed the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C limit. Pledges, such as the Paris Agreement and Glasgow Pact—and updated emissions targets—are not legally-binding. This gap between pledges and policy leaves the world on course for catastrophic warming of [near 3°C](#).

Following the “now or never” Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report in April 2022, the UN Secretary General António Guterres stated that “we are on a fast track to climate disaster. This is not fiction or exaggeration. It is what science tells us will result from our current energy policies”.

In addition, the UK Government's Net Zero Strategy stated that “if we fail to limit global warming to 1.5°C, we risk reaching climatic tipping points, we could lose control of our climate for good”. The 1.5°C goal is ‘on life support’ and only ambitious action from national and sub-national authorities, civil society, the private sector and local communities will help us realise it.

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. More than one in seven of our plants and animals face extinction, and more than 40% are in decline. We therefore welcome the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, signed by the UK Government, which states that—if we fail to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030—we increase the risk of further pandemics, rising global temperatures and loss of species. In order to achieve this, the UK needs a legally-enforceable nature target so that, by 2030, nature is visibly and measurably on the path of recovery—in line with the Global Goal for Nature.

The Climate and Ecology Bill was introduced into the current UK Parliament in May 2022—which, if it becomes law, would require the development of a strategy to ensure that the UK’s environmental response is in line with the latest science. The strategy would ensure that:

- o the ecological crisis is tackled shoulder to shoulder with the climate crisis via a joined-up approach;
- o the Paris Agreement aim is enshrined into law to ensure that the UK does its full and fair share to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5°C;
- o we halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 to ensure that the UK’s ecosystems are protected and restored;
- o the UK takes responsibility for its greenhouse gas footprint, including international aviation and shipping—and by accounting for consumption emissions related to the goods and services that are imported and consumed in the UK;
- o the UK takes responsibility for its ecological footprint in order to better protect the health and resilience of ecosystems—including along domestic and global supply chains; and
- o an independent, temporary Climate and Nature Assembly is set-up—representative of the UK population—to engage with the UK Parliament and UK Government to help develop the strategy;

Lewisham Council agreed a motion in February 2019 to declare a Climate Emergency, committing to make the Borough carbon neutral by 2030.

The Council’s “Climate Emergency Action Plan” was adopted in March 2020, laying out our ambitions and plans to achieve carbon neutrality.

The Climate Emergency has been a key consideration in each of our Borough’s Scrutiny Committees, all of which have a dedicated “Climate Emergency Champion” to ensure climate considerations are at the forefront of discussions.

The Government has recently announced plans for a “Retained EU Law” Bill, which will scrap hundreds of laws without scrutiny, including the Habitats Regulations, leading to a wide range of internationally recognised and well-respected organisations, including the Woodland Trust, the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, criticising the Government’s lack of concern for the environment.

This council believes:

1. Though the actions of Councils such as ours, and residents such as Lewisham’s, are hugely important and impactful, the Climate Emergency cannot be dealt with through individual action alone, nor through the actions of individual Councils;
2. Action to deal with the Climate Emergency is urgently needed at a national, and international, level;
3. Voluntary measures and guidelines are insufficient to see the emissions reductions necessary for the UK to reach Net Zero and fulfil its existing commitments;
4. It is therefore essential to lock emissions targets into law, to properly fund climate action, and to establish the institutions and forums necessary to make the most informed, effective and appropriate decisions to reach Net Zero

This council resolves to:

1. Support the Climate and Ecology Bill;
2. Write to Janet Daby MP, Vicky Foxcroft MP and Ellie Reeves MP, letting them know that the motion has been passed —urging them to sign up to support the Bill, or thanking them for already doing so; and
3. Write to Zero Hour, the organisers of the cross-party campaign for the Bill, expressing its support (joinus@ceebill.uk).

Motion 3 – Southeastern

Proposer: Cllr Luke Warner
Seconder: TBC

This council notes:

On the 11th December 2022, Southeastern Rail will be cutting train services across Lewisham, including through Blackheath to London Charing Cross. With demand on off-peak services around 70% compared to pre-Covid levels, it is a vital line for many Lewisham residents commuting into central London for work and leisure. Scrapping this line entirely will simply make travel less accessible to those who need it most, including those in precarious employment with low pay. Public transport is an important asset to local communities that ensures we are well connected. But for too long under this Conservative government it has been treated as a short-termist political football, resulting in funding pressures that have reduced service reliability and quality.

This is especially true for our railways, which are experiencing a race to the bottom. Ticket prices have risen 46% since 2010 – twice the rate of wage growth – according to the Trades Union Congress (<https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/rail-fares-have-risen-twice-fast-wages-past-10-years-finds-tuc>). However, cuts continue and passengers continuously are treated as a secondary concern.

This is the backdrop to the proposed cuts to Lewisham's vital train services, which have involved no consultation with local stakeholders or the public. It is disappointing that no representative attended the London Borough of Lewisham Public Transport Liaison Committee on the 2nd of November. When in 2017 cuts of similar magnitude were proposed by Southeastern, an overwhelming majority of respondents opposed the changes. With several petitions going along the line through at least the London Boroughs of Bexley, Greenwich, and Lewisham, the scale of opposition to the timetable changes is clear.

The episode is similarly reflective of the Conservatives' flawed approach to government. Given that the Southeastern franchise is run by the Department for Transport, Southeastern's failure to reach out to all those affected does little to dispel the notion that local communities like Lewisham are, yet again, an afterthought for the Conservatives in Westminster. From cuts to vital services and council funding, to unpopular changes like forced academisation, it is clear that successive Conservative administrations are uninterested in ensuring all residents of south-east London can enjoy the good public services expected of one of the richest countries in the world.

This council believes:

- That public transport is an important service that has been damaged by years of Conservative cuts;
- That the residents of Lewisham deserve better than Southeastern's failure to consult on this significant change to timetables; and
- That the decision by Southeastern to cut train services across the borough, including the off-peak services to Charing Cross, should be reversed.

This council resolves:

- To support the petition written and organised by the Labour councillors for Blackheath and Lewisham East MP, Janet Daby; and
- To express disappointment in the failure of Southeastern to send a representative to attend the Public Transport Liaison Committee and to strongly encourage representatives from Southeastern and other relevant parties to attend future Public Transport Liaison Committee meetings.

Motion 4 – Refugees

Proposer: Cllr Juliet Campbell

Seconder: Liam Shrivastava

This Council notes that:

- (i) Lewisham Council is proud of our history of welcoming people seeking safety in Lewisham; (ii) there are significant problems with the UK asylum system that affect people in Lewisham, including a record backlog of cases awaiting a decision, a de facto ban on working, and enforced poverty and homelessness;
- (iii) the Nationality and Borders Act does not address these issues, and has instead created a two-tier system, punishing people seeking safety based on the journeys they make; (iv) under these laws, people seeking safety will be criminalised and threatened with removal to Rwanda;
- (v) people will be warehoused in large accommodation centres, segregated from communities and denied support;
- (vi) many recognised refugees will receive a temporary and precarious status;
- (vii) over 400 charities and faith groups have signed a national pledge to 'Fight the 'Anti-Refugee Laws.'

This Council believes that:

- (i) everyone's claim for asylum should be treated equally and fairly;
- (iii) these are fundamentally 'anti-refugee' laws that undermine internationally recognised rights for people fleeing war and persecution to seek safety;
- (iv) these measures will create ever-longer delays in the asylum process, lead to greater poverty and homelessness in Lewisham and will undermine people's ability to rebuild their lives;
- (v) people seeking safety should be housed as our neighbours and as a part of our communities;
- (vi) the UK needs an asylum system that empowers people seeking safety to rebuild their lives and enables communities to welcome them.

This Council resolves to:

- (i) defend the right to seek safety from war and persecution in the UK and sign the national 'Fight the Anti-Refugee Laws' pledge;
- (ii) call on the UK Government to withdraw the UK-Rwanda agreement, repeal the Nationality and Borders Act, and work with Local Authorities and communities to build a refugee protection system that treats all people with dignity and compassion;
- (iii) work with local organisations and people with lived experience of the asylum system to identify ways to mitigate the effects of these measures in Lewisham;
- (iv) Continue to be a member of the network of cities and towns which promote the inclusion and welfare of people who are fleeing violence and persecution and continue upholding our status as a Council of Sanctuary.

Motion 5 – Rent Cap

Proposer: Cllr Stephen Penfold

Seconder: Cllr Will Cooper

This Council notes that:

1. London is one of the most expensive places to rent in Europe.
2. The Evening Standard reported on 21 October 2022 that private rents have increased at an annual rate of 15.8% in the last 3 months.
3. Trust for London reports that between April 2021 to March 2022 the average rent for a 1-bedroom flat in London is equivalent to 46.3% of gross median income, compared to 26.4% in the rest of the country.
4. In Lewisham the average private rent in 2021 was £1350, when the national average was £898.
5. Housing Benefit and the Housing Element of Universal Credit were set at the 30th percentile of local rents in 2020, meaning that most private rented properties are

unavailable to benefit claimants, a situation which will only get worse the more rents increase.

6. Most European countries have some kind of rent control, including Eire, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Netherlands, Poland and Sweden.
7. England had rent controls in place from 1915 to 1989, when all controls were abolished by the Housing Act 1988.
8. The current Government is proposing to apply a rent cap on Social Housing rents in the forthcoming financial year to assist people with cost of living crisis whilst at the same making no similar provision for private renters.

This Council believes that:

1. Rents in London are spiralling out of control.
2. They are a major driver of inflation.
3. The current level of private rents are pricing many people, including key workers out of London.
4. The Government needs to get control of the situation.

This Council resolves that:

1. Lewisham Council will publicly support the Mayor of London's call for protections for private renters and the introduction of rent controls to help ease the cost of living crisis facing Londoners.
2. The Council will write, as a matter of urgency, to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, urging him to amend the Renters Reform Bill to include a rent cap and thereafter rent controls for London.